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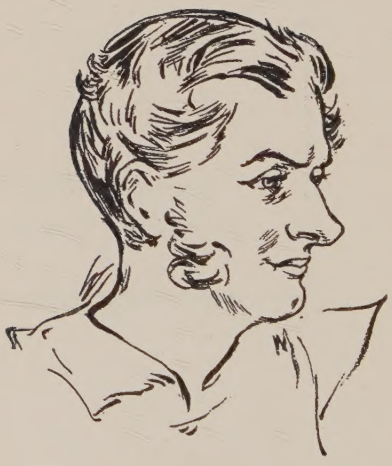
DIANE DE TURGIS
A CHRONICLE OF THE REIGN OF CHARLES IX

by

PROSPER MÉRIMÉE

Translated and illustrated by

THEODORE BOLTON



P. Mérimée

DIANE DE TURGIS
A CHRONICLE OF THE REIGN OF CHARLES IX

BY PROSPER MÉRIMÉE
TRANSLATED & ILLUSTRATED
BY THEODORE BOLTON

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This translation is dedicated to

B. MEADE BOLTON, M. D.

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THE LIFE OF PROSPER MÉRIMÉE

On the 16th of December, 1828, Prosper Mérimée wrote to his friend, Albert Stapfer: "I am working extraordinarily, not only for an idler like myself but for a man of letters, Monsieur Defauconpret excepted. I am writing a mischievous romance which wearies me, but which I wish to finish because I have other plans in view." The present book is a translation of that "mischievous romance," which was published in March, 1829, and was called "Quinze cent soixante-douze; Chronique du régne de Charles IX."

Prosper Mérimée, novelist, archaeologist, historian, linguist and man of the world, was born at Paris on September 28, 1803. He came of a family belonging to the Parisian bourgeoisie and was reared in comfort. His grandfather was a lawyer in Rouen, and his father, Jean François Leonor Mérimée, was well known as an artist and man of letters. He was the "Mr. Mérrimée" to whom the essayist William Hazlitt applied for permission to copy paintings at the Louvre. His mother, Anna Moreau, had relatives in England.

His childhood was spent very happily, and after his travels he always settled near that part of Paris which had been the scene of his earliest recollections. One of these, however, made a life-long impression on him of a far from pleasant nature. Once after he had been reproved for a slight offence he was sent out of his mother's studio. Upon his re-entrance laughter greeted his distress, and the incident added, it is said, to his natural reserve.

After graduating from the Collège d'Henri IV he studied law and was admitted to the bar, but never actively practiced his profession. He occupied his time as much with his friends as at his studies; and on Fridays, at the home of the architect Viollet-le-Duc, he was

always certain to meet Saint-Beuve, Henri Patin, Victor Leclerc and Marc Girardin. There, too, he became intimate with Étienne Delécluze, the pupil and later the biographer of the painter Louis David. It was at this artist's home that he met the man who was to exert the greatest influence on him—Henri Beyle, who wrote under the pen name of Stendhal. Two other artist friends were David d'Angers, who made a portrait medallion of him, and Gerard. With the latter, with Delécluze and de Hauranne he made his first visit to England in May, 1826.

His first book, called "Theatre de Clara Gazul" and published in 1825, consisted of five plays pretending to be translations from the Spanish. In 1827 he published his second book, called "La Guzla," and in 1828 he published "Jacquerie, scènes feodales." The first two show the "local color" of the romantic school, which he adopted for only a short period.

In 1829 appeared "Quinze cent soixante-douze; Chronique du régne de Charles IX." The book was a great success and was translated into English the following year. The libretto, by Eugene Scribe to Meyerbeer's opera, "The Huguenots," first produced in 1836, is said to find its source in Mérimée's novel.

About ten years later Dumas wrote a novel on the same theme with more evident indebtedness to Mérimée. In the character of George Mergy, Mérimée drew his own partial portrait. The Countess de Turgis he described from a woman he knew intimately and was later frequently to introduce into his work. "Mérimée adore le sexe sans pitié," wrote his biographer. Such a woman was Diane de Turgis.

Mérimée's advice on writing given later in life throws light upon the style of this early novel. "Write at least when you begin," he said, "in such a manner that no one will say your work is different from that of other writers."

Taine's appreciation of Mérimée's writing fits aptly into place at this point. He wrote: "We find none of those descriptions which pass out of fashion after half a century, and which today we consider so tiresome in the romances of Walter Scott; we see none of those reflections, disquisitions and interpretations which we think so tedious in the novels of Fielding; nothing but action, and action never fails to be instructive."

Perhaps the most penetrating criticism of "A Chronicle of the Reign of Charles the Ninth" is that by Arthur Symons in his essay on Mérimée. Symons notes that the theme presented "precisely the violence of action and uncertainty of motive" that he relished. Then, after speaking of the humor and irony in the novel, he notes "there are adventures, told with a sword's point of sharpness, and in the fewest possible words." Symons concludes: "It is the most artistic, the most clean-cut of historical novels."

In 1829 Mérimée also wrote three short stories for the magazines: "L'Enlèvement de la redoute," "Tamango," and "Mateo Falcone." His well-known "Le Vase étrusque" appeared in the January, 1830, issue of the *Revue de Paris.*

The latter year he traveled in Spain, and on his return to Paris in 1831 he entered the civil service, where he was steadily advanced under Comte d'Argout. He was successively in the Ministry of the Marine, of Commerce and finally of the Interior. In the meantime his life outside officialdom was spent with friends and by occasional writings for the papers. Presently even the magazine writings ceased and he dissipated both his time and energies. In a letter to "l'Inconnue" he confesses that he was "vraiment et practiquement mauvais sujet pendant deux ans," and about the only production of this period was "La Double Méprise," published in 1833.

He frequented the Café de la Rotonde, near the Palais Royal, where his convives, calling themselves "The Eight," included Stendhal and the painter Eugene Dela-

croix. The artists Deveria and Nanteul he knew also. His "Les âmes du Purgatoire" appeared in the *Revue des Deux Mondes,* August, 1834.

In 1835 he was appointed Inspector General of Historic Monuments in France. His new occupation led him to make numerous excursions to the vestiges of antiquity in many parts of his country. In this way he helped preserve Vezelay. While traveling for the Government in Spain he met the Countess de Montijo, the mother of the future Empress Eugenie.

His travels took him at one time to Greece and the Orient. Scotland and England he frequently visited.

In 1836 he began the correspondence, kept up until a few days before his death, which was later published at "Letters to an Unknown," The following year, 1837, he published the short story, "le Venus d'Ille."

A voyage to Corsica in 1840 brought about the writing of his novel "Colomba," published the same year. In March, 1844, he was elected a member of the French Academy.

His next novel, the celebrated "Carmen," appeared in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* for October, 1845. It was later to become the source of the libretto for Bizet's opera. In the same periodical there appeared, in December, 1847, his "Histoire de Don Pèdre I, roi de Castille."

The play "le Carrosse du Saint-Sacrement," which Mérimée wrote in 1830, was performed at the Française in March, 1850.

In 1851 he visited London to see the Exposition. In June, 1852, against the decision of the courts, he defended his friend Libri, who was charged with the theft of books from the Government collections, with such zeal that he was sentenced to two weeks' imprisonment and fined 1000 francs.

He bore the sentence with an equanimity equal to his courage in making the defense, and his only mention of the incident was in a preface, where he wrote that he had been forced "during the preceding month of July to

spend a fortnight in a place in which he was not at all inconvenienced by the sunshine and where he enjoyed unlimited leisure."

His views on the subject of sacrifice he expressed as follows: "It seldom happens that I sacrifice others to myself—when this does happen I am overcome with remorse."

His contempt for democracy made him enjoy thoroughly the period of the Second Empire—that is, from 1852 to 1870—when he and Octave Feuillet were the literary lions at the Court of the Third Napoleon. His friends were in power and he was made a Senator in 1853, voluntarily giving up the salary attached to his former position.

Beneath his reserve Mérimée hid qualities described by Renan in the following sentence: "The best of sons, the most reliable of friends, brave, discreet, knowing how to give himself—in short, one of those scoffers and cynics capable of all compassion and all charity if only religion does not enter and if they are permitted to act in the name of humanity."

But Mérimée scorned Renan as he did Baudelaire. However, his judgments had nothing personal about them. He alluded contemptuously to Hugo's "L'histoire d'une Crime." But, according to "Victor Hugo, raconte par un temoin de sa vie," upon one occasion Mérimée, surrounded by the Hugo family, showed the cook how to prepare macaroni in the Italian manner. Hugo, for his part, according to Eugene de Merecourt's "Merimée," paid Mérimée a graceful tribute one evening at a gathering by making the apt anagram "M. Premier Prose" out of the letters in his friend's name. As for Flaubert, Mérimée thought he was wasting his talent on *la cuisinière bourgeoise.*

Besides his own language Mérimée knew Latin, Greek, English, Spanish, Italian and a little German. In his later years he studied Russian. The following are translations he made from the Russian authors: La Dame de

Pique, after Pushkin, in the *Revue des Deux Mondes,* July, 1849; Les Bohemiens, after Pushkin, 1852; L'Inspecteur général, after Gogol, 1853; Apparitions, after Turgenieff, in the *Revue des Deux Mondes,* June, 1866; and Nouvelles Moscovites, after Turgenieff, 1869. He wrote an introduction to Turgenieff's Fathers and Sons. Of Pushkin's stories he said: "Magnificent things, things after my own heart—that is to say, Greek in their truth and simplicity."

The following description of Mérimée was written by Taine: "I frequently met Mérimée in society. He was a tall man, erect in his bearing, pale and, excepting his smile, he had the appearance of an Englishman; he had at least, that cold, distant manner which forbids in advance any attempt at familiarity."

Prosper Mérimée finally settled in Cannes, where he died on September 13, 1870. After his death his friends found out that he had turned Protestant during his later years. His "Letters to Another Unknown" was published after his death by the recipient of the correspondence, who gave the proceeds of its sale to the Roman Catholic Church in order that mass might be said in Mérimée's memory.

A reproduction of a portrait of Mérimée as a child by his mother, who was famous for her portraits of children, is to be found in Maurice Tourneux's "Prosper Mérimée, ses Portraits." A line drawing from this portrait is reproduced in an American edition of "Carmen," published by Colliers, where a number of other portraits are reproduced to accompany an essay at the end of the volume. An extended bibliography is appended to Augustin Filon's "Mérimée et ses amis." An English translation of much of Mérimée's work appeared under the editorship of Saintsbury in nine volumes and is now out of print.

THEODORE BOLTON.

BROOKLYN, N. Y., *September, 1925.*

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

I had been reading a rather large number of memoirs and pamphlets relating to the close of the Sixteenth Century. I wished to make a summary of my reading and this is that summary.

I care for only the anecdotes in history, and among anecdotes I prefer those in which I fancy I find a true picture of the customs and character of a certain epoch. This taste is not a very noble one; yet I confess to my shame that I would willingly give Thucydides for some authentic memoirs by Aspasia or by a slave of Pericles; because only memoirs, which are the familiar conversations of an author with his reader, can furnish those portraits of mankind which amuse and interest me. It is not in Mézeray, but in Montluc, Brantôme, d'Aubigné, Tavannes, La Noue, etc., that one can gain an idea of Frenchmen in the Sixteenth Century. The style of these contemporary authors is as informing as their matter.

For example, I read in l'Estoile this brief note:

"The Lady de Châteauneuf, one of the King's favorites before he went to Poland, married for love Antinotti, a Florentine officer of the galleys at Marseilles and detecting him in an act of infidelity, she slew him man-like, with her own hands."

By means of this anecdote and many others which abound in Brantôme, I can reconstruct in my mind a character and bring to life a woman at the Court of Henry III.

It seems to me it is interesting to compare those manners with ours and to observe in the latter a decadence of energetic passions in favor of tranquillity and perhaps of happiness. But it is a question if we are much better than our ancestors, and this is not so easy to determine because at different times opinions have greatly varied on the subject of the same actions.

Thus about the year 1500 an assassination or a poisoning did not inspire the same horror it inspires today. A gentleman killed his enemy treacherously; he begged for pardon; obtained it; then reappeared in the world and not a soul would think of frowning upon him. Sometimes, even, if the murderer had accomplished a legitimate vengeance they spoke of the assassin in the same terms as they speak to day of an honorable man who has been grievously offended by a scoundrel and kills him in a duel.

So it seems evident to me that the actions of the men in the Sixteenth Century must not be judged by our ideas in the Ninteenth. What is a crime in a state of advanced civilization is only a bold deed in a more backward state, and in an age of barbarism it is perhaps a laudable action. People feel that the judgment they agree to pass on the *same action* must, therefore, vary *among countries,* for between one race and another there is as much difference as between one century and another.

(May not one also extend this rule to individuals? And the son of a thief who himself steals, is he as culpable as an educated man who goes into fraudulent bankruptcy?)

Méhémet Ali, with whom the Beys of the Mamelukes contended for the control of Egypt, invites, on a certain day, the principal chiefs of their militia to a festival held in the court of his palace. They enter, then the gates are shut. Albanians under the cover of the high terraces shoot them down, and from that time on Méhémet Ali reigns alone in Egypt.

Well and good! We negotiate with Méhémet Ali; he is highly esteemed by the Europeans and in all the journals he passes as a great man, they call him the benefactor of Egypt. However, what can be more horrible than to have those defenseless men killed? In fact, murder traps of this sort are sanctioned by the custom

of the country and by the impossibility of handling affairs differently. It is then that we can apply the maxim of Figaro: *Ma per Dio, l'utilita!*

If a Minister, whom I shall not name, had found the Albanians ready to shoot at his command, and if during a dinner he had dispatched the chief members of the Left, this action would have been *in reality* the same as that of the Pasha of Egypt, but *in morality* a hundred times more culpable. Assassination is not esteemed according to our customs. But this same Minister turned out many of the liberal electors who were obscure Government employes, frightened the rest and thus obtained the election to suit himself. If Méhémet Ali had been Minister in France, he would have taken no stronger measures, and without doubt the French Minister in Egypt would have been obliged to have recourse to the fusilade, since dismissals are not sufficient to produce a moral effect on Mamelukes.

The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew was a great crime even for that day, but I repeat—a massacre in the Sixteenth Century was not the same as the crime of a massacre in the Ninteenth. Let us add that the greater part of the nation took part in it or sympathized with it: they armed themselves to attack the Huguenots, who were considered as strangers and enemies.

The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew was a sort of national insurrection similar to that of the Spaniards in 1809; and the citizens of Paris in assassinating the heretics firmly believed they obeyed the voice of heaven.

It does not concern a story-teller like myself to give in this book a *précis* of the historical events during the year 1572; but since I have spoken of Saint Bartholomew I cannot help stating here certain opinions which occurred to me in reading that bloody page of our history.

Have the causes leading up to that massacre been well understood? Was it long premeditated, or was it rather the result of a sudden determination, or even of chance?

No historian gives me satisfactory replies to any of these questions.

They admit as proof street rumors and alleged conversations having very little weight in trying to decide an historical point of such importance.

Some of these have it that Charles IX was a prodigy of dissimulation; others represent him as a fantastic and impatient butcher. If long before the 24th of August he burst into threats against the Protestants, that is cited as proof that he had been long meditating their destruction; if he treated them kindly, that is cited as proof that he was dissembling.

I shall retell only one story found in all the accounts proving with what levity they admit even the least probable rumors.

They say that about a year before Saint Bartholomew's Day a plan of massacre had already been formed. This was the plan: At the Pré-aux-Clercs they were going to build a tower of wood; they were going to place in it the Duke of Guise with Catholic gentlemen and soldiers; and the Admiral and the Protestants were going to make a sham attack on them so as to present the spectacle of a siege to the King. When this kind of tournement had started, and upon a given signal, the Catholics were to load their arms and kill the astonished enemy before they had time to make a defense. To embellish the story, they add that a favorite of Charles IX, named Lignerolles, indiscreetly divulged the entire plot by saying to the King, who was abusing the Protestant lords: *Ah! Sire, wait a bit. We have a fortress which will avenge us upon all heretics.* Note, if you please, that not a plank of this fortress had been placed. Upon which the King took care to have the braggart assassinated. They say the project was devised by the Chancellor Birague, to whom, however, they attribute words which point to vastly different intentions: *in order to deliver the King from his enemies he asked for only a few more cooks.* This latter method was much

more practicable than the other, whose extravagance renders it little short of impossible. Indeed, how could the suspicions of the Protestants fail to be aroused by preparations for this mimic battle where the two parties, open enemies, were thus to be placed against each other? Certainly to band them in troop formation and give them arms was a bad way of making a good march against the Huguenots. It is evident that if they wished to exterminate them at that time it would have been much better to attack them isolated and unarmed.

For my own part I have a firm conviction that the massacre was not premeditated, and cannot conceive how the contrary opinion has been adopted by authors who at the same time agree in representing Catherine as a very wicked woman, no doubt, but also possessing one of the profoundest political minds of her century.

Let us put aside morals for the moment and examine the pretended plot from the point of view of expediency. Now, I contend that it was not expedient for the Court, and further that it was executed with such bungling that it must be supposed that those who planned it were the most extravagant of men.

Let one examine the fact whether the authority of the King gained or lost by its execution, and whether it was to his interest to permit it.

France was divided into three great parties: that of the Protestants, of which, since the death of Condé, the Admiral was the chief; that of the King, which was the weakest; and that of the Guises, or the ultra-royalists of the time.

It is evident that the King, who feared alike both the Guises and the Protestants, was compelled to try to uphold his own authority by keeping these two factions at odds. To crush one was to place himself at the mercy of the other.

The seesaw system was at that time well known and practiced. It was Louis XI who said: *Divide in order to govern.*

Now, we shall see if Charles IX was devout, for excessive piety might have suggested measures to him opposed to his interests. But everything proclaims to the contrary that if he was not a free thinker, he was by no means a fanatic. Besides, his mother who ruled him would never have hesitated to sacrifice her religious scruples, if she had any, to her love of power.

(They cite a saying of Charles IX as an instance of profound dissimulation, which, on the contrary, seems to me to be only the gross fancy of a man quite indifferent to matters of religion. The Pope made difficulties about granting the necessary dispensations for the marriage of Marguerite de Valois, sister of Charles IX, with Henry IV, who was then a Protestant. "If the Holy Father refuses," said the King, "I shall take my sister Margoton under my arm and have her married in an ordinary meeting house.")

But let us suppose that Charles, or his mother, or if anyone wishes, his Government, had, against all maxims of politics, determined upon the destruction of the Protestants of France—the determination once made probably they would have given mature thought to the most proper method for assuring success. Now, one thing suggests itself to the mind immediately as the safest plan for the party; that is, that the massacre should occur in all the cities of the kingdom at the same time so that the Reformers might be unable to defend themselves, since they would be everywhere attacked by superior forces. (The population of France was then little short of twenty million souls. It was estimated that at the time of the second civil war the Protestants numbered more than a million and a half, but they had proportionately more wealth, more soldiers and more generals.) A single day would have been enough to destroy them. Thus Ahasuerus planned the destruction of the Jews.

However, we read that the first orders of the King for massacring the Protestants are dated August 28—that is to say, four days after Saint Bartholomew's Day, and

when the news of that great butchery must have preceded the dispatches of the King and given alarm to all those of that religion.

Again, it would have been necessary to seize the strongholds of the Protestants. Because while they retained control of these the royal authority was not assured. Thus, according to the hypothesis of a regular plot on the part of the Catholics, it is manifest that one of the important steps would have been to seize La Rochelle by the 24th of August and to have an army at the same time on foot in the south of France to prevent any combined uprising of the Reformers.

(During the second civil war the Protestants surprised more than half the fortified places of France in a single day. The Catholics could have done the same thing.)

Nothing of the sort was done.

I cannot admit that the same men could have conceived a crime whose results would have been so momentous and then have executed it so badly. The measures were indeed so badly taken that several months after Saint Bartholomew's Day the war broke out afresh, in which the Reformers certainly won all the glory and from which they also gained new advantages.

Finally, does not the attempted assassination of Coligny, made two days before Saint Bartholomew's Eve, completely refute the supposition of a conspiracy? Why kill the chief before the general massacre? Was this not the way to alarm the Huguenots and force them to be on guard?

I know that some authors attribute to the Duke of Guise alone the attack on the person of the admiral; but, besides the fact that public opinion accused the King of the crime,* and that the assassin received a formal recompense *par le roi,* I draw even from this an argument against the idea of a conspiracy. In short, had it really existed the Duke of Guise must have had a hand in it; and if so, why did he not delay his private vengeance for

*Maureval was surnamed "The King's Butcher." See Brantôme.

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two days so as to make sure of it? Why compromise in this manner the entire enterprise in the sole hope of advancing two days the death of his enemy?

So, to me, everything seems to prove that the great massacre was not the result of a conspiracy of the King against a section of his people. The massacre of Saint Bartholomew seems to me the result of a popular insurrection which could not have been foreseen and which was improvised.

In all modesty I shall now advance my explanation of the enigma.

Coligny had negotiated three times with his sovereign with force against force; that was reason enough for him to be hated. Jeanne D'Albret being dead, and the two young princes, the King of Navarre and the Prince of Condé, being too young to exert any influence, Coligny was truly the only chief of the Reform Party. Upon his death the two princes, in the midst of the enemies' camp, and so virtually prisoners, were at the King's mercy. Thus the death of Coligny, and Coligny alone, was important for assuring the power of Charles, who perhaps had not forgotten a saying of the Duke of Alva:

"A salmon's head is worth more than ten thousand frogs."

But if the King could rid himself of the Admiral and the Duke of Guise at the same stroke, it is evident that he would remain absolute master.

The course, therefore, that he should have taken was this: to get the Admiral assassinated, or, if one wishes it, to instigate the assassination of the Duke of Guise, and then have that prince prosecuted as a murderer, announcing that he was abandoned to the vengeance of the Huguenots. Everyone knows that Guise, guilty or not guilty of Maureval's attempt, quit Paris in hot haste, and that the Reformers, with the apparent sanction of the King, set no bounds to their menaces against the princes of the house of Lorraine.

At that epoch the people of Paris were horribly fanatical. The citizens, with their military organization, formed

a kind of national guard which would take up arms at the first sound of the tocsin. The Duke of Guise was as much beloved by the Parisians, both for his father's memory and his own merits, as the Huguenots, who twice besieged their city, were hated by them. The kind of favor they enjoyed at Court at the time when a sister of the King married a prince of their religion redoubled both their arrogance and the hatred for their enemies. In short, it was sufficient for a chief to put himself at the head of these fanatics and cry "strike" for them to rush at the throats of their heretic countrymen.

The Duke, banished from Court, menaced by the King and the Protestants, had to seek support from the people. He assembles the chiefs of the citizen guard, talks to them of a conspiracy by the heretics, gives orders to exterminate them before their plot is ripe, and then *only* the massacre is premeditated. As but a few hours passed between the plan and its execution, the mystery which surrounded the conspiracy and the keeping of the secret by so many men is easily explained; a matter which otherwise seems very extraordinary because *secrets travel fast in Paris* (a saying of Napoleon).

It is difficult to determine what part the King took in the massacre; if he did not approve of it, he certainly did not interfere with it. After two days of murder and violence he disavowed the whole affair and tried to stop the carnage. (He attributed the attempt on Coligny and the massacre to the Duke of Guise and the princes of the house of Lorraine.) But when one unchains the fury of the mob it is not appeased by a little blood. More than sixty thousand victims were called for. The monarch was obliged to let himself be swept down the irresistible stream. He revoked his orders of clemency and soon gave others for extending the assassinations all over France.

Such is my opinion of the massacre of Saint Bartholomew, and in presenting it I shall remark, with Lord Byron: *I only say, suppose this supposition.* (Don Juan, canto I; stanza 85.)

1829. PROSPER MÉRIMÉE.

CHAPTER I.

THE RÊITRES.

The black bands came over
The Alps and their snow,
With Bourbon the Rover,
They passed the broad Po.

LORD BYRON, *The Deformed Transformed.*

On the road to Paris, not far from Étampes, may still be seen a large square building with pointed windows ornamented with crude sculpture. Over the door is a niche that once sheltered a Madonna carved in stone, but during the Revolution it shared the fate of many saints of both sexes and was broken with ceremony by the President of the Revolutionary Club at Larcy. Later on another Virgin was substituted which, though made only of plaster, keeps up a fair show by the aid of some silken rags and bits of broken glass, giving an air of respectability to the cabaret of Claude Giraut.

More than two centuries ago, that is to say in 1572, this building was, as it is today, designed for the relief of thirsty travelers; but it then had an entirely different aspect. The walls were covered with inscriptions attesting the varying fortunes of a civil war. Here could be read the words: "Long live the Prince!" then; "Long live the Duke of Guise! Death to the Huguenots!" A little farther away a soldier had drawn with charcoal a gibbet and body, and, as if forestalling its misinterpretation, had written below: "Gaspard de Châtillon." However, it seemed that the Protestants had in turn ruled the district, for the name of their chief had been blurred and replaced by that of the Duke of Guise. Other inscriptions half erased, difficult to read and still more difficult to express in decent terms, indicated that the King and his mother were as little respected as the partisan chiefs. But the poor Madonna appeared to suffer most of all from civil and religious fury. The statue, shivered in twenty places

by bullets, proved the zeal of the Huguenots for the destruction of what they termed "The Pagan images." While the devout Catholic reverently took off his hat in passing the statue, the Protestant cavalier thought himself obliged to prove the skill of his arquebuss; and when he shot successfully he esteemed himself as highly as if he had destroyed the Beast of the Apocalypse and had crushed idolatry.

For some months peace had been established between the rival parties; but it was sworn with the lips and not registered in the heart. On both sides animosity still continued as implacable as before. Everything showed that warfare had scarcely ceased; everything announced that peace would not be of long duration.

The "Golden Lion Inn" was filled with soldiers. By their foreign accents and their bizarre costumes they could easily be recognized as those German cavalrymen, called Rêitres (corrupted from the German *reiter,* meaning horseman), who came to offer their services to the Protestant party, particularly when they expected good pay. If the skill of these soldiers in horsemanship and their dexterity in the use of firearms made them formidable in battle, on the other hand they gained a reputation, perhaps more justly acquired, as consummate plunderers and ruthless conquerors. The troop which had taken possession of the inn numbered fifty riders; they left Paris the evening before and were traveling toward Orleans to recruit the garrison.

While some rubbed down their horses which were tied to the walls, others lighted fires, turned spits and occupied themselves in the kitchen. The unlucky innkeeper stood by, cap in hand and with tears in his eyes, looking at the disorderly scene for which his kitchen served as the theater.

His poultry yard was stripped, his cellar pillaged, even the necks of the bottles were knocked off as the impatience of his guests did not allow them to wait for the ceremony of uncorking; and to cap it all he knew very

well there was not the slightest compensation to be expected from those who were treating him as if they were in conquered territory, notwithstanding the strict orders of the King for the discipline of his soldiers. It was an established rule during those unhappy times that in peace or war armed men acted as they saw fit wherever they found themselves.

Before an oaken table, blackened with grease and smoke, sat the captain of the Rêitres. He was a large, strong man of fifty or thereabout, with a long aquiline nose, a very red face and thin, grizzled hair which scarce covered a deep scar reaching from his left ear down to his bushy moustache. He had taken off his helmet and cuirass, displaying a doublet of Hungarian leather chafed by the rubbing of his armor and carefully patched in several places. His sabre and pistols were placed on the bench within his reach; by him he kept only his dagger, a weapon which a prudent man put aside only when he went to bed.

To his left sat a young man with a florid complexion, tall and rather well built. His doublet was embroidered and one could see that his entire costume was a little more elegant than that of his companion. He was the captain's cornet.

Two young women from twenty to twenty-five years of age were seated at the table and kept them company. There was a mixture of wretchedness and luxury in their clothes, which were evidently not made for them, but seemed to have fallen into their hands during the fortunes of war. One wore a damask bodice trimmed with lace of gold, but very tarnished, and having a simple cloth skirt. The other was dressed in violet-colored velvet and wore a man's gray felt hat topped with a cock's feather. Both were attractive, but their bold looks and laxity of speech showed they were in the habit of living with soldiers. They had wandered from Germany without any regular employment. She of the velvet gown was a Bohemian; she told fortunes with cards and played on the

mandolin. The other had some skill in surgery and seemed to hold a distinguished place in the affections of the cornet.

These four, each facing a bottle and a glass, were amusing themselves with drink while dinner was being prepared.

The conversation languished, as is natural with hungry people, when presently a young man of tall stature and richly dressed, riding a fine chestnut horse, halted at the door of the inn. The trumpeter of the Rêitres rose from his bench and advancing toward the stranger took the bridle of his horse. The stranger was about to thank him for what he regarded as an act of politeness; but he was soon undeceived, for the trumpeter opened the horse's mouth, looked at its teeth with the eye of a connoisseur, stepped back a few paces and examined the legs and crupper of the noble animal with a nod of satisfaction. "Fine horse, monsieur, you have there!" he said in his jargon, then he added some words in German which produced loud laughter among his comrades, and finally resumed his place.

This unceremonious examination was not at all to the traveler's taste; however, he contented himself with giving a look of contempt at the trumpeter and dismounted without anyone's assistance.

The innkeeper, who now came out of his hostelry, respectfully took the bridle in his hands and whispered so as not to be heard by the Rêitres:

"God preserve you, young gentleman! You have come at an evil hour! The company of these scoundrels—may Saint Christopher wring their necks!—is by no means agreeable to good Christians such as you and I."

The young man smiled bitterly.

"These gentlemen," he said, "are they Protestant cavaliers?"

"Yes, Rêitres upon the march," continued the innkeeper. "Our Lady confound them! In the single hour they have

been here they broke half my furniture. They are pitiless plunderers like that great devil of an Admiral, their chief, Monsieur de Châtillon."

"For a graybeard like yourself," replied the young man, "you show little prudence. Suppose, by chance, he to whom you speak is a Protestant—he might give you a broken head for an answer." And as he spoke he flipped his white leather boot with his horsewhip.

"How? — What? — You a Huguenot? — Protestant I mean!" cried the astonished innkeeper. He started back a pace and looked at the stranger from head to foot as if to discover by some sign his religion. This scrutiny and the open laughing countenance of the young man reassured him little by little; he continued speaking in a lower voice:

"A Protestant with a green velour suit! A Huguenot with a Spanish ruff! Oh, that is not possible! Ah! My young lord, you do not see such finery among heretics. By Saint Mary! A doublet of fine velour is too good for such low folk!"

The whip whistled a moment—then slashed across the face of the poor peasant, thus giving evidence of the religion of his interlocuter.

"Insolent talker! That will teach you to hold your tongue. Go, lead my horse to the stable and see that he lacks nothing!"

The innkeeper bowed his head in terror and quickly led the horse to a sort of shed as he muttered low curses against all heretics, German as well as French; and the poor beast would no doubt have been deprived of his supper on the score of being a heretic also had not the young man followed to see the fodder placed before him.

The stranger entered the kitchen, greeted those present and gracefully touched the brim of his broad hat, which was crowned with a large yellow and black plume. The captain returned the salute and both looked at each other for some time without speaking.

"Captain," said the young stranger, "I am a Protes-

tant gentleman and rejoice to find myself here with some of my brothers in religion. If it is agreeable to you we shall dine together."

The captain, favorably impressed with the distinguished bearing and splendid costume of the young stranger, replied that he considered himself honored. Mademoiselle Mila, the young Bohemian just mentioned, made room for him on the bench beside her, and, with great generosity, gave him her own glass, which the captain promptly filled.

"I am called Dietrich Hornstein," said the captain, touching his glass to the young man's. "You no doubt have heard of Captain Dietrich Hornstein? It was I who led the forlorn hope at the Battle of Dreux and later at Montcontour."

The stranger understood this indirect way of being asked his own name. He replied:

"I am sorry, Captain, that I cannot in return give you a name as celebrated as yours; I mean my own, for my father's was well known during our civil wars. I am called Bernard de Mergy."

"You speak the name to the right man!" said the captain, filling his glass to the brim. "I knew your father, Monsieur Bernard de Mergy. I knew him from the beginning of the wars; intimately, too. To his health, Monsieur Bernard."

The captain held out his glass and said a few words in German to the troopers. The moment the wine touched his lips all the horsemen threw their hats into the air and gave a shout. The host thought this a signal for a massacre and fell on his knees. Bernard was rather surprised at the extraordinary honor; but he felt himself called upon to reply to this German politeness, and proposed the captain's health.

The bottles, already drained by vigorous attacks before his arrival, could not suffice for this new toast.

"Get up, you sneak," said the captain, turning his

head to the innkeeper, who was still on his knees; "get up and bring us more wine. Do you not see the bottles are empty?"

And the cornet, to give him proof, threw one of them at the poor man's head. The innkeeper hurried to the cellar.

"The man is an insolent dog," said Mergy, "but you might have hurt him badly if the bottle had struck him."

"Bah!" said the cornet, and laughed loudly.

"The head of a Papist," said Mila, "is harder than that bottle and just as empty."

The cornet laughed louder still and the rest imitated him, including Mergy, who smiled, however, at the mouth of the Bohemian rather than at her cruel pleasantry.

The wine was served, supper followed; and after a moment's silence the captain continued, with his mouth full:

"Yes, I knew Monsieur de Mergy! He was a colonel of infantry in the first enterprise of Monsieur le Prince. We shared the same quarters for two months during the first siege of Orleans. How is he now?"

"Well enough, thank God! considering his great age. I have often heard him speak of the Rêitres and the gallant charges they made at the Battle of Dreux."

"I also knew his eldest son—your brother, Captain George. I mean to say before——"

Mergy seemed embarrassed.

"He was daring when he had but three hairs to his beard," continued the captain, "but *malepeste!* how hot-headed. I am sorry for your father; he must have suffered very much from the abjuration."

Mergy reddened up to his eyes; he stammered out a few words of excuse for his brother, but it was easy to see that he judged him more severely than the captain of the Rêitres.

"Ah! I see you are pained," said the captain. "Good: let us change the subject. It was a loss for religion and a great gain for the King, who is said to load him with honors."

"You have just come from Paris." Mergy interrupted, anxious to turn the conversation. "Has the Admiral arrived? You have seen him no doubt? How is he at present?"

"He came with the Court from Blois just as we were leaving. He looks marvelously fresh and healthy. He has full twenty civil wars in his stomach yet, the dear fellow! His Majesty treats him with such distinction that all the Papists are bursting with envy."

"Indeed? But the King can never honor him too highly for his merit?"

"Listen, I saw the King yesterday on the staircase at the Louvre holding the hand of the Admiral. Monsieur de Guise followed with the pitiful air of a terrier who has just been whipped; and do you know what I think? The King reminded me of the man who exhibits the lion at the fair—he takes his paw as if it were a dog's; though Giles keeps his countenance and appears undaunted, yet he never forgets the terrible claws. Yes! By my beard! The King seemed to feel the claws of the Admiral."

"The Admiral has a long arm," said the cornet. This was a kind of slogan in the Protestant army.

"He is very handsome for his age," remarked Mademoiselle Mila.

"I would rather have him for a lover than any young Papist," added Mademoiselle Trudchen, the cornet's friend.

"He is the pillar of our religion," said Mergy, wishing to contribute his portion of praise.

"Yes, but he is devilish strict in his discipline," said the captain, shaking his head. The cornet gave a meaning wink and worked his ponderous face into a grimace intended for a smile.

"I did not expect," said Mergy, "to hear an old soldier like you, Captain, reproach the Admiral for the strict discipline he observes in his army."

"Yes, of course, discipline is necessary; but still some allowance should be made for the hardships that a soldier

endures and he should be permitted to enjoy himself when fortune gives him the chance. Bah! Every man has his faults, and let us drink to the Admiral's health, even if he did have me hanged."

"The Admiral had you hanged!" exclaimed Mergy. "You look well preserved for a man who has been hanged."

"Yes, *sacrement!* He did have me hanged. But I bear him no malice. Let us drink to his health."

Before Mergy could renew his questions the captain filled all the glasses, took off his hat and ordered the troopers to give three cheers. When the glasses were empty and the uproar had subsided, Mergy asked:

"Why did he have you swung up, Captain?"

"For a mere bagatelle. Pillaging a miserable monastery in Santonges and then burning it."

"Yes, but the monks had not got out of it;" interrupted the cornet, laughing heartily at his pleasantry.

"Bah! What does it matter if such *canaille* burn up now or a little later? Would you believe it, Monsieur de Mergy? The Admiral was really incensed; he had me arrested and turned over without ceremony to the provost marshal. Then all his gentlemen, all the nobility who were with him, even Monsieur de La Noue, because, they say, *noue et ne denoue pas* (ties but does not untie), all the captains begged him to pardon me, but he refused absolutely. *Ventre de loup!* What a rage he was in! He chewed his toothpick in his anger, and you know the proverb: *God deliver me from the Paternosters of Monsieur de Montmorency and the toothpicks of Monsieur l'Admiral!*—God absolve me! He said that we must stifle Rapine while it is still a girl; if we let it grow up to be a big woman she will destroy us. Then came the minister with his Bible under his arm, and the two walked me to a certain oak tree. I think I see it now, with one branch standing out as if on purpose; the rope was tied about my neck. Every time I think of that rope my throat gets dry as tinder."

"Here is something to wet it," said Mila, and promptly refilled the glass of the narrator.

The captain drank it at one swallow and continued as follows:

"I already valued myself as no better than an acorn when I happened to say to the Admiral: 'Eh! Monseigneur, is this the way you treat the man who led the lost hope at Dreux?' I saw him dash his toothpick from his mouth and take up another. I said to myself: 'Good! That is a lucky sign.' He then called for Captain Cormier, whispered something, and then said to the provost: 'Now! String up that man for me.' And he turned on his heel. I was hoisted up in a twinkling, but brave Cormier drew his sword and immediately cut the rope so that I fell from the branch red as a boiled lobster."

"I felicitate you," said Mergy, "on your good luck in getting off." He looked at the captain attentively and felt somewhat mortified in thus finding himself in the company of a man who merited the severest penalty; but, during those evil days, crimes were so frequent that they could not be judged so rigorously as today. Cruelties by one party authorized reprisals by the other, and religious hatred smothered almost every sentiment of national sympathy. Besides, to tell the truth, the secret advances of Mademoiselle Mila, who started to become very jolly, and the fumes of the wine which mounted more rapidly in his young head than in the hard ones of the Rêitres—all these gave him an unusual indulgence for his table companions.

"I hid the captain in a covered wagon for eight days," said Mila, "and only let him out at night."

"And I," added Trudchen, "brought him food and drink; he is here to tell you."

"The Admiral pretended to be very angry with Cormier, but the whole thing was a farce kept up between the two. As for me, I followed the army a long time without daring to face the Admiral until at the Siege of Lorgnac he discovered me in the trenches and said ot me: 'Dietrich,

my friend, since you were not hanged, go get yourself shot.' And I filled the breach, for I know what he meant; went bravely to the assault and next day I stopped him on the main avenue with my hat in hand pierced by a shot from an arquebuss. 'Monseigneur,' I said to him, 'I have been shot just the same way I was hanged.' He smiled and threw me his purse, saying: 'Here is a new hat for you! Since that time we have always been good friends. Ah! What a glorious sack that was at the town of Lorgnac! The water comes to my mouth every time I think of it!"

"Ah! What beautiful silk dresses!" cried Mila.

"What a mass of fine linen!" cried Trudchen.

"What a time we had with the nuns of the great convent!" said the cornet. "Two hundred arquebusiers lodged among a hundred nuns!——"

"There were more than twenty who abjured Popery," said Mila, "because they found the Huguenots so much to their taste."

"Then, too," cried the captain, "it was a pretty sight to see our light horse troops with priests' chausables on their backs, horses feeding at the altar, and ourselves drinking the holy fathers' good wine from their silver chalices!"

He turned to call for more drink and saw the innkeeper with his hands clasped and his eyes rolled to heaven with an expression of indescribable horror.

"Imbecile!" said brave Dietrich Hornstein, shrugging his shoulders. "How can a man be such a fool as to believe all the nonsense the Papist priests give out? See here. Monsieur de Mergy, at the Battle of Montcontour I killed one of the Duke of Anjou's gentlemen with a pistol shot; in taking off his doublet do you know what I found on his stomach? A great piece of silk all covered with the names of saints. He thought it would ward off the bullets. By the blood! I taught him that no scapulary could resist a Protestant bullet."

"Yes, scapularies," interrupted the cornet, "but in my country they sell parchments which are proof against lead and iron."

"I should prefer a steel cuirass, well tempered," said Mergy, "such as those made by Jacob Leschot in Flanders."

"But listen," replied the captain; "there is no doubt that you can be made bullet-proof. I myself saw a gentleman at Dreux struck by a shot from an arquebus in the middle of his breast; he knew the receipt for ball-proof ointment and rubbed himself with it under his cowhide doublet, and you could not find the slightest red and black mark of a bruise on him."

"And do you not think the cowhide alone was sufficient, without the ointment, to turn aside the bullet?"

"Oh! You French, you believe nothing. But what would you say if you had seen, as I have, a Silesian soldier put his hand on a table and none of the company could pierce it with hard dagger strokes? But you laugh and do not think it possible? Ask Mila. You see that girl there? She comes from a land where the sorcerers are as common as priests in this land; she can tell you frightful stories about them. Sometimes during the long autumn evenings when we are seated outdoors about the fire she tells stories which make my hair stand on end."

"I should be delighted to hear one," said Mergy. "Pretty Mila, give me the pleasure."

"Yes, Mila," urged the captain, "tell us some story while we are finishing these bottles."

"Then listen to me," said Mila; "and you, my young gentleman who believe nothing, please keep your doubts to yourself."

"How can you say that I believe nothing?" said Mergy to her in a low voice. "On my word, I believe that you have bewitched me for I am already in love with you."

Mila pushed him away gently, for Mergy's mouth almost touched her cheek, and after casting a furtive glance to the right and left to assure herself that everyone was listening, she began as follows:

"Captain, you have surely been in Hameln?"

"Never."

"And you, cornet?"

"Nor I either."

"What! Is there no one here who has been to Hameln?"

"I passed a year there," said a trooper, coming forward.

"Good! Fritz, did you ever see the church at Hameln?"

"More than a hundred times."

"And its painted windows?"

"Certainly."

"And what did you see painted on the glass?"

"On the glass? On the window to the left I think there is a tall man in black playing on a flute and a number of little children following him."

"Correct, now I shall tell you the story of that man and the little children."

"Many years ago the inhabitants of Hameln were plagued by a great number of rats, which came from the north in such swarms that the earth was black with them, and no wagoner dared drive his horse across the path of these animals. Everything was devoured in less than no time; and in a granary it was no greater effort for the rats to dispose of a barrel of corn than it is for me to drink down a glass of fine wine."

She drank, wiped her lips and continued:

"Mouse traps, rat traps, snares and poison were useless. They brought a boat from Bremen loaded with eleven hundred cats; but they did no good. For each thousand they killed, ten thousand appeared to take their places more ravenous than the first. In fact, had no relief arrived, not a grain of corn would have remained in Hameln and all the inhabitants would have died of famine.

"Then one Friday a tall man, swarthy, thin, large-eyed and with a mouth stretching from ear to ear, presented himself to the Burgomaster of the city. He was dressed in a red doublet, a pointed hat, large breeches covered with ribbons, gray stockings and shoes with flame-colored rosettes. He had a little pouch of skin at his side. I think I see him now."

All turned their eyes involuntarily toward the wall at which Mila looked.

"Then you have seen him, have you?" asked Mergy.

"Not I, but my grandmother, and she remembered his face so well she could have drawn his portrait."

"And what did he say to the Burgomaster?"

"He offered to deliver the city from the plague which afflicted it for a hundred ducats. You can imagine that the Burgomaster and the citizens readily agreed. Immediately the stranger drew a bronze flute from his bag, and taking his station at the market place in front of the church, but with his back to it, mind you, he began to play an unusual tune such as no German piper had ever played. As soon as the rats and mice heard that tune they came out from all the granaries, through all the holes in the walls, and from the tiles on the roofs by hundreds and thousands and flocked around him. The stranger walked toward the river, playing all the while, and after taking off his hose, entered the water, followed by the rats, who were all drowned—except one who stayed behind. The magician, for he was none other, asked a rat who had not quite stepped into the Weser River why Klaus the White Rat had not come also.

" 'Seigneur,' replied the rat, 'he is so old that he cannot walk far.'

" 'Go carry him yourself!' replied the magician. The rat scampered down the street to the city and without delay returned with an old, white rat, so very fat that he could not crawl. The two rats, the younger dragging the elder by the tail, plunged into the Weser and were drowned just like their companions. Thus the city was purged of rats. But when the stranger presented himself at the Town Hall to receive his promised reward the Burgomaster and the citizens, remembering that they had nothing more to fear from rats and thinking to steal a march on an unprotected stranger, had the face to offer him ten ducats instead of the promised hundred. The stranger protested; they gave him a flat refusal. He then

threatened to make them pay much more dearly unless they kept their contract to the letter. The citizens laughed loudly at the threat and pushed him out of the door of the Town House, calling him 'Old Ratcatcher!'—which insult was repeated by the children of the city, who pursued him through the streets to the New Gate. On the following Friday the stranger returned to the market place, but this time with a purple-colored cap tilted in the most rakish fashion. He took out a flute from his sack, different from the other, and as soon as he began to play all the children from six to fifteen years of age followed and went out of the city with him."

"And did the inhabitants of Hameln let him carry them away?" asked Mergy and the captain at the same time.

"—— They followed him to Koppenburg Mountain and into the mouth of a cavern, which is now filled up. The flute-player entered the cavern and the children followed after him. For some time the music of the flute was still heard; then it diminished little by little, and finally it ceased. The children had disappeared, and after that they were never heard of again."

The Bohemian stopped to note the effect of her story on her listeners.

The Rêitre who had been to Hameln took up the story and said:

"That story is true, for at Hameln whenever they speak of an extraordinary event they say: That happened twenty years, or ten years, after the loss of our children; the Lord of Falkenstein sacked our city sixty years after the loss of our children."

"But the most curious thing," said Mila, "is that at the same time there appeared, a great way off in Transylvania, certain children who spoke good German and who could not tell where they came from. They married in the country and taught their children their language, for which reason they speak German in Transylvania today."

"And these are the children of Hameln whom the Devil transported there?" said Mergy, smiling.

"I call Heaven to witness that it is true!" cried the captain, "for I have been in Transylvania and I know that they speak German there, although they speak the most infernal jargon in all the surrounding districts!"

The captain's evidence was worth just as much as a great deal of other evidence.

"Do you wish me to tell you your good fortune?" Mila asked Mergy.

"Willingly," replied Mergy, and passed his left arm about the waist of the Bohemian, while he held out the palm of the other to her.

Mila looked at it for about five minutes without speaking and shook her head from time to time with a pensive air.

"Well, my pretty child, shall I have the woman I love for my mistress?"

Mila tapped his hand.

"An hour of danger," she said, "blue eyes will bring fortune and misfortune. The worst of it is that you will shed your own blood."

The captain and the cornet remained silent, both seeming to be equally struck by the sinister termination of the prophecy.

The innkeeper turned about and crossed himself.

"I shall believe you a veritable enchantress," said Mergy, "if you will tell me what I am going to do within an hour."

"You are going to embrace me," whispered the Bohemian in his ear.

"She is a sorceress!" cried Mergy, embracing her. They continued to whisper to each other and a firm understanding seemed to be established from that moment.

Trudchen took up some sort of mandolin, which had nearly all of its strings, and strummed a German march. Then, seeing a circle of soldiers around her, she sang a

war song whose refrain the Rêitres thundered out at the top of their voices. The captain, excited by her example, began to sing, in a voice loud enough to break all the glasses, an old Huguenot song whose music was as barbarous as its words:

"The Prince of Condé
Is dead;
But Monsieur the Admiral
Is still in his saddle
With La Rochefoucauld
To hunt down all the Papists,
Papists, Papists, Papists."

The Rêitres, heated with wine, all began to sing, each to a different tune. The plates and bottles strewed the floor with their fragments; the kitchen echoed with oaths, shouts of laughter and drinking songs. Soon, however, sleep, favored by the fumes of the Orleans wine, began to have its effect on most of the actors in that Bacchanalian scene. The soldiers stretched out on the benches; the cornet placed two sentinels at the door and staggered to bed, while the captain, who still seemed to retain some idea of a straight line, stumbled, unassisted, upstairs into the host's room, which he chose as the best in the hotel.

And Mergy and the Bohemian? Both of them had disappeared while the captain was singing.

CHAPTER II.

THE MORNING AFTER THE REVELRY.

Un porteur: Je dis que je veux avoir de l'argent tout à l'heure.—MOLIÈRE, *Les Précieuses Ridicules.*

It had long been broad daylight when Mergy awoke with his head somewhat troubled by the thoughts of the night before. His clothes were scattered pell-mell about the room and his valise was open upon the floor. He started up from his sleep, looked for some time at the scene of disorder and rubbed his forehead as if to collect his thoughts. His countenance expressed at once fatigue, astonishment and uneasiness.

A heavy step was heard on the stone staircase leading to his room. The door opened without the formality of a knock, and the innkeeper entered with an air even sulkier than that of the day before; but now it was easy to read in his looks an expression of impertinence which replaced that of fear.

He cast a glance about the room and crossed himself as if horrified by the scene of so much confusion.

"Ah! ah! my young gentleman," he cried; "still in bed? Come get up, for you have not settled your accounts."

Mergy gave an alarming yawn and put one leg out of the bed.

"Why all this disorder? Why is my valise upset?" he demanded in a tone of as much ill-temper as that of his host.

"Why? Why?" replied the latter; "how should I know? What do I care for your valise? You have turned my house into one grand disorder. But by my good patron Saint Eustache, you shall pay me for it.

As he spoke Mergy put on his scarlet riding breeches

and then his purse fell out of the open pocket. The sound it made as it fell was not quite so loud as he expected, for he instantly picked it up with anxiety and opened it.

"I have been robbed!" he cried, turning to the innkeeper.

Instead of twenty gold crowns which it had contained he found but two.

Master Eustache shrugged his shoulders and laughed contemptuously.

"I have been robbed!" repeated Mergy, buckling on his belt hastily. "I had twenty gold crowns in that purse and I am determined to have them back; they have been stolen from me in your house."

"By my beard! I am very glad to hear it," cried the innkeeper insolently; "that will teach you to keep company with sorceresses and rogues. But," he added in a very low voice, "birds of a feather flock together. All these gallows' birds, heretics, sorcerers and rogues consort with and keep robbing each other."

"What are you saying, scoundrel?" cried Mergy, getting angrier because he felt the truth of the reproach; and like every man in the wrong he eagerly seized the occasion for a quarrel.

"I say," replied the landlord, raising his voice and placing his hands on his hips, "I say you have broken everything in the house and I intend to make you pay to the last sou."

"I shall pay my score and not one liard more. Where is Captain Corn—Hornstein?"

"They drank," continued Eustache, raising his voice still higher, "they drank more than two hundred bottles of my good old wine, but you shall answer me for it."

Mergy was now completely dressed.

"Where is the captain?" he cried in a voice of thunder.

"He left more than two hours ago and may he go to the Devil with the rest of the Huguenots until we are able to burn them all!"

A vigorous blow was the only reply that Mergy could find at that moment.

The surprise and the force of the blow made the innkeeper stagger back two steps. The horn handle of a large knife stuck out from the pocket of his jerkin; he moved his hand toward it. No doubt a great tragedy would have occurred had he obeyed the first impulse of his rage. But prudence arrested the effect of his anger as he noticed Mergy stretching his hand toward the head of his bed where his sword was hanging. He instantly banished all thought of so unequal a combat and ran precipitately down the steps bawling:

"Murder! Fire!"

Master of the field of battle, but very anxious about the consequences of his victory, Mergy buckled on his sword, examined his pistols, closed his valise, and taking it up resolved to carry his complaints to the nearest judge. He opened his door and had just put his foot on the first step of the staircase when a whole band of enemies inopportunely presented itself before him.

The innkeeper came first with an old halberd in his hand; three scullions armed with spits followed close at his heels; a neighbor with a rusty arquebuss formed the rear guard. Neither one party nor the other expected to meet so soon. Only five or six steps separated the hostile parties.

Mergy let his valise drop and seized one of his pistols. This threatening move showed Master Eustache and his myrmidons how badly their order of battle was ranged. Like the Persians at Salamis, they neglected to choose a position in which their numbers might deploy to advantage. The only one of their troop who carried a firearm could not use it without wounding his comrades in front, whilst the pistols of the Huguenot, commanding the entire length of the staircase, seemed to the point of drilling them all with the same shot. The slight click made by the trigger when Mergy cocked his pistol fell rather unpleasantly on their ears, and indeed appeared almost as

terrible to them as the explosion of the weapon itself would have. With one spontaneous movement the column of the enemy turned about face and made for the kitchen, which they considered a field of battle with vastly greater advantages. In the disorder inseparable from so precipitous a retreat the host, wishing to shift his halberd, got it between his legs and fell down. Like a generous enemy, Mergy disdained the use of his arms and contented himself with hurling at the fugitive his valise, which, falling towards them like a rock and accelerating its speed at each step, finished the rout. The staircase was cleared of enemies, while the broken halberd remained as a trophy.

Mergy quickly rushed to the kitchen, where his enemies were already drawn up in single file. He who carried the arquebuss was aiming it and blowing his fuse. The host, all covered with blood, for his nose had been badly bruised by the fall, stood by his friends like wounded Menelaus behind the Greek ranks. Instead of Machon or Podalirius, however, his wife stood with her cap untied and her hair disheveled, wiping his face with a soiled napkin.

Mergy made his decision without hesitation. He stepped to the right of the man, holding the arquebuss and presented the mouth of his pistol to his breast.

"Throw down your fuse or you are a dead man!" he cried.

The fuse fell to the floor and Mergy, setting foot upon the burning cord, extinguished it. Then all the confederates ground arms on the spot.

"As for you," said Mergy, addressing the host, "the little correction you have already received from me will no doubt teach you to treat strangers with more politeness; if I wanted I could have your sign torn down by the bailiff of the place; but I do not wish to harm you. Come, what do I owe you for my share?"

Master Eustache, noting that he had uncocked his frightful pistol and put it in his belt, took courage and, wiping his face, began to mutter sadly:

"Break all my dishes, beat up all the people, smash the noses of good Christians—make the hell of a racket—I do not see after that how you can make amends to an honest man."

"Let me see," said Mergy, smiling. "For your broken nose I shall pay you what I think it is worth. For your smashed plates, address yourself to the Rêitres; that is their affair. For the rest, tell me how much I owe you for my supper last night."

The innkeeper looked at his wife, his scullions and his neighbor as if in search of advice and protection at the same time.

"The Rêitres! The Rêitres!" he said. "I shall never see the color of their money; their captain gave me three livres and the cornet gave me a kick."

Mergy took out one of his two remaining coins.

"Come," he said, "let us part good friends." And he threw it at Eustache, who, instead of reaching out his hand, let it fall disdainfully to the floor.

"A crown!" he cried, "a crown for a hundred broken bottles; a crown for ruining an entire house; a crown for beating up everybody!"

"A crown, nothing but a crown!" repeated his wife with the same doleful tone. "Catholic gentlemen come here who sometimes make a little racket, but at least they know the price of things."

Had Mergy been a little more in funds he would undoubtedly have sustained the reputation of his party for liberality.

"In good time," he said drily. "But these Catholic gentlemen at least had not been robbed. Decide quickly; take the crown or you get nothing." And he stepped forward as if to pick it up.

But the hostess seized it instantly.

"Come! Bring out my horse, and you put down your spit and carry my valise."

"Your horse, my gentleman!" said one of Master Eustache's valets and made a grimace.

The host, in spite of his chagrin, raised his head, and his eyes glittered an instant with an expression of malig--nant joy.

"I shall fetch him for you myself, my good Seigneur; I shall fetch your fine horse." And he left with the napkin still to his nose. Mergy followed.

But what was his surprise when instead of the fine sorrel horse on which he arrived he saw a little, old, stumbling piebald, disfigured with a huge scar on his forehead! In place of the fine Flemish velour saddle he found an old leather one mounted with iron, such as the soldiers used.

"What does this mean? Where is my horse?"

"Your Seigneurie must take the trouble to find the Protestant Rêitres and ask them that question," replied the host with assumed humility; "those dignified strangers must have taken him with them; they must have made a mistake on account of the resemblance."

"Superb horse!" said one of the scullions; "I wager he is not more than twenty years old."

"You cannot deny that he was once a battle horse," said another; "see the sabre cut he received on his forehead."

"What a splendid saddle cloth!" ejaculated still another—"all black and white like the robe of a minister."

Mergy entered the stable, which he found empty.

"And why have you let them carry off my horse?" he cried furiously.

"By our Lady! my gentleman," said the valet, who went to the stable with him, "the trumpeter took him away and told me you had arranged a trade with him."

Mergy was choking with rage and did not know what to do in his predicament.

"I shall find the captain," he muttered between his teeth; "he will bring justice to bear on this scamp who has robbed me."

"Certainly," said the host, "your Seigneurie does well, because this captain—what's his name?—always looked like a very honest man."

Mergy inwardly reflected that the captain had most probably authorized, if not favored, the robbery himself.

"You may upon the same occasion," added the host; "you may perhaps get back your gold crowns from that young woman; no doubt she took them by mistake, as she was packing her bundles in the early morning."

"Shall I tie your honor's valise to your honor's horse?" asked the stable boy in a most respectful but insulting manner.

Mergy soon found that the longer he stayed the more insolence he would be obliged to bear from the *canaille*. So when his valise was secured he sprang into the wretched saddle; but the horse, noticing that he had a new master, was seized with the malicious desire to test his skill as a rider. He had not gone far before he found he had to deal with an excellent horseman little disposed to endure his caracoles; so after one or two capers, well rewarded by great jabs from sharp-pointed spurs, he thought the wisest thing was to give up the contest and settle into a good, steady trot. But he had exhausted part of his strength in the struggle with his rider and, as usually happens in such cases, he stumbled, or as they say, he failed in all four legs. Our hero presently recovered himself, somewhat bruised but more furious at the hisses that arose at his expense. He even thought of taking revenge by dealing blows with the flat of his sword, but upon reflection he thought it best not to notice the insults directed at him, and remounting, he took the road to Orleans, followed at a distance by a band of children, the oldest of them singing the song of Jehan Petaquin—the ridiculous hero of a popular song—while the younger ones shouted with all their might: "Faggots! For the Huguenot! For the Huguenot! For the Huguenot!"

After he had ambled sadly on for half a league he began to see there was but little chance of overtaking

the Rêitres that day; that his horse would probably be sold already, and if not it was very doubtful if these worthy gentlemen would consent to return him. Little by little he resigned himself to the idea that his loss was irreparable; and this being the case, there was no reason to go on the Orleans road, so he returned to the one leading to Paris by a crossroad to avoid passing the fatal cabaret which was the scene of his disasters. His natural aptitude for looking upon the bright side of life asserted itself and he considered himself fortunate in coming off so very well, because he might perhaps have been robbed more completely, or even assassinated; as it was he still had a gold crown left; nearly all of his clothes and a horse which, although ill-looking, could carry him fairly well. Moreover, it must be acknowledged that the remembrance of jolly Mila made him smile more than once. In short, after a few hours' journey, he was almost touched by the delicacy of the kind girl who had only taken eighteen crowns when she could just as easily have carried off twenty. He found it difficult to bear the loss of his fine sorrel mare, but was bound to admit that a more hardened robber than the trumpeter might not have left him his own in its place.

That evening he arrived in Paris just before the gates closed and took up his lodgings at a hotel in the Rue Saint Jacques.

CHAPTER III

THE YOUNG COURTIERS.

Jachimo: The ring is won.
Posthumus: The stone's too hard to come by.
Jachimo: Not a whit; your lady being so easy.
SHAKESPEARE, *Cymbeline.*

In coming to Paris Mergy hoped to be strongly recommended to Admiral Coligny and obtain service in the army which men said would fight in Flanders under the command of that distinguished captain. He flattered himself that his father's friends, for whom he brought letters, would support his claims, introduce him to the Court of Charles and then to the Admiral, who held a kind of court also. Mergy knew that his brother enjoyed great consideration, but was very undecided whether or not to seek him out. The abjuration of George Mergy had separated him almost entirely from his family, who looked upon him as none other than a stranger. This was not the only instance of a family separated by a difference of religious opinion. For a long time George's father had forbidden the name of the apostate from being mentioned in his presence and had justified his rigorous determination by this passage from the Evangelist: "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out." Young Bernard by no means maintained this inflexibility, although his brother's change of religion appeared to him a dark stain upon the honor of the family, and his sentiments of fraternal tenderness necessarily suffered because of this opinion.

Before he decided upon what step to take in the matter, and even before he presented his letters of introduction, he thought it advisable to find means of filling his depleted purse; and with this intention he left his hotel to visit a goldsmith who lived on the Bridge of Saint Michel and owed his family a large sum he was entitled to claim.

At the entrance to the bridge he met some young men dressed with great elegance who, with locked arms, completely barred the entire passage left by the shops and booths rising on each side and cutting off the view of the river it spanned. Behind these young men marched their lackeys, each carrying in a scabbard one of those long two-edged swords used in duels, and a poniard with a hilt large enough to serve as a buckler in case of need. No doubt the weight of these arms seemed too heavy for the young men, but perhaps they were eager to show the world that they could afford richly dressed lackeys.

They seemed to be in high spirits from their constant bursts of merriment. If a well-dressed woman passed near them they saluted her with a mixture of politeness and impertinence; they also seemed to take particular delight in rudely elbowing grave citizens in black coats, who gave way muttering a thousand imprecations against the insolence of gentlemen at Court. One of the company walked ahead with his head down and seemed to take no part in the sport.

"*Dieu me damne*, George!" cried one of the young men, slapping him on the shoulder; "you are getting furiously sullen. It is a good quarter of an hour since you opened your mouth. Are you going to turn Carthusian?"

The name George made Mergy start, but he did not hear the answer made by the man addressed by that name.

"I will wager a hundred pistoles," cried the first, "that he is in love with a dragon of virtue. Poor friend! I pity you; it is very unlucky to find a cruel mistress in Paris."

"Go to Rudbeck the magician," said another; "he will give you a love philtre."

"Perhaps," said a third, "perhaps our friend the captain is in love with a nun. These devilish Huguenots, converted or not, are always after the brides of the good Lord."

A voice that Mergy instantly recognized replied sadly:

"Parbleu! I could bear it very well if it were nothing but a little love affair; but," he then lowered his voice, "De Pons, whom I sent with a letter to my father, has returned and brought me word that he still persists in his resolution of having nothing to do with me."

"Your father is an old rock," said one of the young men; "he is one of those old Huguenots who tried to take Amboise."

At this moment Captain George, having accidently turned his head, recognized Mergy. Uttering a cry of surprise, he rushed toward him with open arms. Mergy did not hesitate a moment, but opened his arms and pressed him to his bosom. Perhaps had their meeting been less sudden he would have tried to arm himself with indifference; but surprise restored to nature all her rights. At the present moment they looked at each other like two old friends who have met after a long voyage.

After their embraces and first question Captain George turned to his friends some of whom had stopped and were looking on at the scene.

"Gentlemen," he said, "you see this unexpected meeting. Pardon me if I leave you and talk to my brother, whom I have not seen for full seven years."

"Parbleu! We shall not let you off today. The dinner is ordered and you must go with us." And he seized George at the same time by his mantle.

"Béville is right," said another, "and we cannot let you off."

"Oh! *Mordieu!"* replied Béville, "let your brother come and dine with us. Instead of one good companion we shall have two."

"Excuse me," said Mergy, "but I have some affairs which I must attend to today. I have letters to present——"

"You can present them tomorrow."

"They must be given today; besides," added Mergy, laughing and somewhat ashamed, "I must confess I have no money and must try to get some."

"Ah! By my faith, that is a good excuse indeed!" cried all of them together. "We will not allow you to refuse dining with good Christians like us in order to go and borrow money from Jews!"

"Here, my good friend," said Béville, affectedly shaking a long silk purse tucked under his belt, "make me your banker. The dice have been very kind to me for the past fortnight."

"Come! Come! No delay, let us be off to our dinner at 'The Moor'" said all the young men with one voice.

The captain saw that his brother was still undecided.

"Bah! You will have time enough to present your documents. As for money, I have that, so come with us. You will learn something about life in Paris."

Mergy yielded. His brother presented him to his friends one after the other: Baron de Vaudreuil, Chevalier de Rheincy, Vicomte de Béville, and so forth. They received the newcomer with great ado and he was obliged to embrace all of them successively. Béville came last.

"Oh! Oh! Curse me, comrads! I smell a heretic. I wager my gold chain against a pistole that you are a follower of that religion."

"It is true, monsieur, but I am not as religious as I might be."

"See how easily I distinguish a Huguenot among a thousand! *Ventre de loup!* What a serious expression these *parpaillots* put on when they speak of their religion!"

"I think we should never jest about such a subject."

"Monsieur de Mergy is right," said Baron de Vaudreuil, "and some evil will yet befall you, Béville, for your ill-timed raillery of sacred things."

"Look at that fellow with his saint-like face," said Béville to Mergy, "he is the most libertine of us all, and yet he is preaching at us all the time."

"Let me be what I am, Béville. I am a libertine because I cannot subdue the flesh. I can at least give respect where respect is due."

"As for myself, I respect—my mother, the only honest woman I ever knew. For the rest, *mon brave,* Catholics, Huguenots, Papists, Jews or Turks—it is all the same to me. I care no more about their quarrels than I do about a broken spur."

"Infidel!" muttered Vaudreuil. He made the sign of the cross on his mouth and held up his handkerchief so as not to be seen at it.

"You know, Bernard," said Captain George, "you will find no disputants here like our old master Theobald Wolfsteinius. We care little about such theological conversations and employ our time much better, thank God!"

"Perhaps," replied Mergy rather bitterly," it would have been better if you had listened with more attention to the learned dissertations of the worthy minister you have just mentioned."

"A truce on that subject, little brother; some other time I shall talk to you about that, perhaps; I know you have formed an opinion of me—but no matter—we are not here to talk of such things—I think myself an honest man and you will undoubtedly see proofs of it some day. Let us stop this now and think only of amusing ourselves."

He dashed his hand across his brow as if to dispel a painful idea.

"Dear brother!" said Mergy, pressing his hand; George returned the pressure, and they both hastened to join their companions who were some steps ahead of them.

As they passed in front of the Louvre a number of richly dressed people were coming out, and the captain with his friends saluted and embraced all the young lords they met, at the same time introducing young Mergy, who thus became known to all the celebrated characters

of the day. He also learned all their nicknames, for every man of note has one, as well as the scandalous histories connected with them.

"Do you see that pale, sallow-looking councillor?" said one. "That is Petrus de Finibus, in France Peter Séguier, who manages by one means or another always to gain his own ends. There is little Captain Brulebancs, Thore de Montmorency; there is the Archbishop of Bottles—the Archbishop de Guise—who sits his mule tolerably well—before dinner. Here is one of the heroes of your own party, the gallant Comte de la Rochefoucauld, surnamed the Enemy of Cabbages. In the late war he made a desperate arquebus attack on a field of cabbages because his bad eyesight caused him to mistake them for lancers."

In less than a quarter of an hour Mergy knew the names of almost all the court ladies, their lovers and the number of duels which their beauty had occasioned. He saw that the reputation of a lady was in exact proportion to the deaths she had caused; thus Madame de Courtavel, whose present acknowledged lover had killed two of his rivals, had a much greater renown than poor Countess de Pomeraude, who had caused only one duel which terminated in a slight scratch.

A well-formed woman, mounted on a white mule led by a squire and followed by two lackeys attracted Mergy's attention; her costume was of the latest fashion and quite stiff with embroidery. As far as he could judge she was handsome. For everyone knows that women in those days never went outdoors without a mask; hers was of black velour; one might guess, from what showed through the apertures, that she had skin of rare whiteness and eyes of deep blue.

She reined in her mule as she passed the young men and even seemed to look at Mergy with some attention, although she did not know him. During her progress every plume swept the ground and she nodded graciously in return for the numerous salutations given her by the

throng of admirers as she passed. A gentle puff of wind raising the bottom of her long satin dress gave one a glimpse of a small white silk shoe and a few inches of rose colored stocking.

"Who is the lady whom all the world salutes?" asked Mergy with interest.

"Already in love!" cried Béville. "However, everyone yields to her; Huguenots and Papists are all in love with Countess Diane de Turgis."

"She is one of the beauties of the Court," added George, "one of the most dangerous Circes to our young gallants. But, *peste!* She is a citadel not easily taken."

"How many duels does she count?" asked Mergy with a smile.

"Oh! she counts only by scores," replied Baron de Vaudreuil; "but the most notable thing about her is that she wanted to fight herself and sent a formal challenge to a lady of the Court who had offended her."

"What a story!" cried Mergy.

"It would not be the first," said George, "which has been fought in our days. She sent Madame de Saint Foix a formal challenge in good style, calling to mortal combat with sword and poniard and *en chemise,* like a real *raffiné.*" (The word *raffiné* was then applied to professional duellists.)

"I wish I could have made a second to one of those women while they were *en chemise,*" said Chevalier de Rheincy.

"And did the duel take place?" asked Mergy.

"No," replied George, "the affair was adjusted."

"You adjusted it," said Vaudreuil; "you were in love with Madame de Saint Foix at the time."

"Fie! Fie! No more than you," said George in the most discreet tone.

"Madame de Turgis is like Vaudreuil," said Béville; "she makes a salmagundi of religion and the manners

of the time; she wishes to fight a duel, which, according to my notions, is a mortal sin, and hears two masses a day."

"Leave me alone about my mass!" cried Vaudreuil.

"Yes, she does go to mass," said de Rheincy, "but it is only to show her face unmasked."

"It is for that reason I think that many women go to mass," observed Mergy, glad to find an opportunity of passing a jest upon the religion he did not profess.

"And also to the conventicle," said Béville. "When the sermon is over and the lights are out. *Par la mort!* I have often been tempted to turn Lutheran myself."

"And do you believe all those absurd stories?" asked Mergy contemptuously.

"Believe them! Our little friend Ferrand went to the conventicle at Orleans to meet the wife of a notary, a splendid woman. He could not see her without going there; luckily one of his friends, a Huguenot, told him the password."

"Impossible!" said Mergy.

"Impossible! And why?"

"Because no Protestant would ever have been base enough to introduce a Paptist into a conventicle."

This reply caused great shouts of laughter.

"Ah! Ah!" said Baron de Vaudreuil; "you believe that if a man be a Huguenot he can neither be a robber, traitor nor an agent of gallantry?"

"He must have fallen from the moon," cried de Rheincy.

"As for me," said Béville, "if I had a billet-doux to send a Huguenot woman I should get the minister himself to carry it."

"It is," said Mergy, "probable then that you are in the habit of trusting such commissions to your priests?"

"Our priests——" said Vaudreuil reddening with anger.

"Stop all this tedious conversation," interrupted George, noticing that each repartee grew more offensive,

"and say no more about any of the sects. I propose that the first one who pronounces the word Huguenot, Papist, Protestant or Catholic shall pay forfeit."

"I approve!" cried Béville; "he shall be fined a dozen glasses of Cahors wine at the tavern where we are to dine."

There was a moment of silence.

"Since the death of poor Lannoy, who was killed at Orleans, La Turgis has had no lover," said George, who did not want his friends to brood over theological subjects.

"So that is why little Navarette has withdrawn," said Vaudreuil; "he fears so terrible a rival."

"Is Comminges jealous?" said George.

"He is as jealous as a tiger," said Béville, "and swears that he will kill any man who dares make love to the pretty countess. So that she will be obliged to take Comminges or have no lover at all."

"Who is this formidable man?" asked Mergy, feeling, without knowing why, a great curiosity about everything relating to the Countess de Turgis.

"He is," replied de Rheincy, "one of our most famous *raffinés,* and as you are from the country I shall explain the meaning of that fine word. A *raffiné* is a gallant to perfection, one who is ready to fight whenever anyone's cloak touches his, whenever anyone spits within four feet of him, or for any other equally legitimate reason."

"Comminges," said Vaudreuil, "one day carried a man to the Pré-aux-Clercs;* they took off their doublets and drew their swords. 'Are you Berny d'Auvergne?' asked Comminges. 'I am not,' replied the other; 'I am called Villéquier, and I am from Normandy.' 'That is a pity,' retorted Comminges, 'I have mistaken my man, but since I have called you out you must fight.' And he killed him bravely."

*The classic dueling grounds in those days. The *Pré-aux-Clercs,* Clerk's Meadow, extended along the riverside opposite the Louvre, on the ground now comprised between the Rue des Petits Augustins and the Rue du Bac.

Each one added some example of Comminges' skill or his quarrelsome temper. The subject was a fertile one, so the conversation lasted until they were out of the city and at "The Moor Tavern" situated in the middle of a garden near the site of the Tuileries, which, commenced in 1564, was then under construction. Several gentlemen of George's acquaintance met them there, so they made a numerous company at table.

Mergy, who sat next to Baron de Vaudreuil, noticed that he crossed himself as he sat and muttered in a low voice this singlar prayer:

"Laus Deo, pax vivis, salutem defunctis, et beata viscrea virginis Mariae quae portaverunt Aeterni Patris Filium!"

"Do you know Latin, Monsieur le Baron?" asked Mergy.

"You heard my prayer?"

"Yes, but I confess I did not understand it."

"Well, to tell you the truth, I do not understand Latin myself and have no clear idea of what that prayer might mean; but I learned it from one of my aunts, who always found it efficacious, and since I have used it I never had any but good results from it."

"I think it must be Catholic Latin and so we Huguenots cannot understand it!"

"Forfeit! Forfeit!" cried Béville and Captain George at the same time. Mergy paid the forfeit with good grace, fresh bottles were promptly placed on the table, and this put the company in fine humor.

Presently the conversation grew louder, and Mergy took advantage of the tumult to speak to his brother without paying attention to what was going on around them.

They were interrupted in this *aside* just at the end of the second course by the noise of a violent dispute arising between two of the roisterers.

"That is false!" cried the Chevalier de Rheincy.

"False!" cried Vaudreuil. And his naturally pale features became as pale as death.

"She is the most virtuous and chaste of women," continued the chevalier.

Vaudreuil smiled bitterly and shrugged his shoulders. All eyes were fixed on the actors in that strange scene, and each one seemed willing to await its results in silent neutrality.

"What is the matter, messieurs? And why all the racket?" asked the captain, ready as usual to oppose any infraction of the peace.

"It is our friend the chevalier," said Béville tranquilly; "he insists that Madame de Sillery, his mistress, is chaste, while our friend de Vaudreuil declares she is not and has reason to know otherwise."

The general shout of laughter immediately following only increased Rheincy's fury and he looked daggers at both Vaudreuil and Béville.

"I can show you her letters," said Vaudreuil.

"I defy you!" cried the chevalier.

"Very well!" said Vaudreuil with a very malignant sneer, "I shall read these gentlemen one of her letters. They perhaps know her handwriting as well as I do, for I do not pretend to be the only one honored by her letters and good graces. Here is a letter I received just today." He felt in his pocket as if to take out a letter.

"You lie in your throat!"

The table was too wide for the hand of the Baron to reach his adversary who was seated nearly opposite.

"I will make you swallow that lie until it chokes you." he cried. And he accompanied the words with a bottle which he threw at his head. Rheincy dodged the blow and, upsetting his chair in his haste, rushed toward the wall to take down his sword which hung there.

The entire company started up, some to interfere in the quarrel, most of them to avoid being in it.

"Stop! Fools that you are!" cried George placing himself in front of the Baron who was nearest him. "Should two friends quarrel about a miserable woman?"

"A bottle thrown at one's head is as bad as a blow," said Béville frigidly. "Come, Chevalier, my friend. Out with your sword!"

"Fair play! Fair play! Make a ring!" cried nearly all the guests.

"Halloo! Jeannot; shut the door," said the host of "The Moor" nonchalantly—he was used to scenes of this kind—"if the archers were to pass by they might interrupt the gentlemen and break up my establishment."

"Will you fight in an eating place like drunken lancers?" persisted George, who was anxious to gain time; "wait until tomorrow at least."

"Tomorrow be it," said de Rheincy. And he started to sheath his sword.

"He is afraid, our little chevalier," said Vaudreuil.

Immediately Rheincy pushed aside all those who stood in his way and sprang at his enemy. Both attacked furiously; but Vaudreuil had time to twist a napkin about his left arm and he used this skilfully to parry the sword thrusts; while Rheincy, who neglected a similar precaution, received a wound in his hand at the first passes. However, he never stopped fighting courageously, and called to his lackey for his poniard. Béville stopped the servant, declaring that since Vaudreuil had no dagger his adversary should also have none. Some of the chevalier's friends protested; very angry words were exchanged, and no doubt the duel would have changed into a general row had not Vaudreuil ended it by striking his enemy down with a dangerous cut in the breast. He promptly put his foot on Rheincy's sword to prevent his picking it up and raised his own to give the *coup de grace.* The dueling rules of those days permitted this atrocity.

"An unarmed enemy!" cried George. And he wrested his sword from him.

The chevalier's wound was not mortal but he lost much blood. They bandaged him the best they could

with napkins, while he muttered with a forced laugh between his teeth that the affair was not ended.

Presently a monk and a surgeon appeared and disputed over the wounded man. The surgeon nevertheless had the preference, and having his patient removed to the banks of the Seine he conveyed him in a boat to his lodgings.

In the meantime some of the valets carried off the bloody napkins and washed the gory pavement while others placed fresh bottles on the table. As for Vaudreuil, after he had carefully wiped his sword he sheathed it, made the sign of the cross, then, with imperturbable calm, drew a letter from his pocket, requested silence and read the first line, which excited great explosions of laughter:

"My dear, that tiresome chevalier who haunts me——."

"Let us get out of this," said Mergy to his brother with an expression of disgust.

The captain followed him. The letter occupied the general attention and so their absence was not noticed.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CONVERT.

Don Juan: Quoi! tu prends pour de bon argent ce que je viens de dire, et tu crois que ma bouche était d'accord avec mon coeur?—MOLIÈRE, *le Festin de Pierre.*

Captain George returned to the city with his brother and took him to his lodgings. As they walked they scarcely exchanged a word, the scene at which they had just been witnesses had left upon them a painful impression, making them involuntarily keep their silence.

This quarrel and the irregular duel following were, however, nothing extraordinary at that epoch. From one end of France to the other the sensitive disposition of the nobility caused the most fatal incidents; to such a point was it carried that at a moderate calculation, during the reigns of Henry III and Henry IV, the rage for dueling cost France the lives of more noblemen than ten years of civil war.

The captain's rooms were splendidly furnished. Curtains of flowered silk and rugs of variegated colors first caught the eye of Mergy, heretofore accustomed to the utmost simplicity. He entered a small room which his brother called his oratory; the word boudoir had not yet been invented. A *prie-Dieu* of oak, richly carved, a Madonna by an Italian artist and a vase for holy water garnished with a large spray of boxwood seemed to justify the pious designation, while a couch covered with black damask, a Venetian looking-glass, a portrait of a woman, weapons and musical instruments indicated rather more worldly habits on the part of its owner.

Mergy cast a look of contempt at the vase with its branch of boxwood which sadly recalled his brother's apostasy. A little lackey brought preserves, confectionery and white wine. Tea and coffee were not yet in use and wine supplied the place of those elegant beverages with our simpler ancestors.

Mergy, with a glass of wine in his hand, looked continually from the Madonna to the vase and from the vase to the *prie-Dieu*. He then sighed deeply and looked at his brother stretched nonchalently on the couch.

"You are then really a Papist!" he said. "What would our mother say if she were here?"

The thought seemed to have a depressing effect on the captain. He knit his brows and waved his hand to his brother as if to ask him not to start such a painful subject, but in spite of this the latter continued pitilessly:

"Is it possible that you have abjured the faith of our family with the heart as well as the lips?"

"The faith of our family!—It never was mine—What?—I believe those sermons of your hypocritical, nasal ministers!—I——"

"No doubt you think it better to believe in purgatory, confession and the infallibility of the Pope! You prefer to kneel before the dusty sandals of a Capuchin! The time will come when you will think you cannot have dinner without reciting the prayer of Baron de Vaudreuil."

"Listen, Bernard, I hate disputes, especially those on religion; but sooner or later I must explain myself to you, and since we have begun the subject let us settle it. I shall speak to you from my heart."

"Then you do not believe all the absurd stories of the Papists?"

The captain shrugged his shoulders and made one of his large spurs ring as he dropped the heel of his boot on the floor. He cried:

"Papists! Huguenots! Superstition on both sides. I cannot believe what my reason tells me is absurd. Our litanies and your psalms—both balderdash, one worth as little as the other. Only," he added merrily, "there is sometimes good music in our churches, whereas in yours there is a war to the death on delicate ears."

"A fine point of superiority for your religion, and this is what makes proselytes for it!"

"Do not call it my religion, for I believe in it no more

than I do in yours. Ever since the time I have thought for myself, ever since my mind was my own——"

"But——"

"Oh! A truce to your sermons. I know by heart all that you want to tell me. I, too, once had my hopes, my fears. Do you think I have not made powerful efforts to preserve the happy superstitions of my childhood? I have read all our doctors to gain consolation for the doubts that assailed me, and I only strengthened them. In short, I could not and cannot believe. Belief is a precious gift which has been denied me, but I would not for the world deprive others of it."

"I pity you."

"Yes, and you are right. As a Protestant I did not believe in the meeting; as a Catholic I no longer believe in the mass. What! *Morbleu!* The atrocities of our civil wars—are they not enough to uproot the most robust faith?"

"Those atrocities are the work of men alone, and men who pervert the word of God."

"That answer is not your own; but still you are very glad that I am not convinced. Your God, I do not understand him, I cannot understand him—It would be 'with every reservation,' as our friend Jodelle says."

"Since the two faiths are indifferent to you, why that abjuration which afflicts both your family and your friends?"

"I have written twenty times to my father to explain my motives and justify myself, but he has thrown my letters unopened into the fire, and has treated me more harshly than if I had committed some great crime."

"Neither my mother nor I approved of his excessive harshness, and if we had not received orders——"

"I do not know what was thought of me. It is of little importance; but I will tell you what made me take the sudden step, which no doubt I should not take if the thing were to be done over again——"

"Ah! I always thought you would repent of it."

"I repent! No, for I do not think that I acted badly. When you were still at college studying Latin and Greek, I had a cuirass on my back, had worn the white scarf* and was fighting in our first civil war. Your little Prince of Condé, who was responsible for so many of your faction's faults—your Prince of Condé, I say, used to mind your affairs when his amours gave him time. A woman loved me and the Prince wanted me to give her up to him; I refused and he became my mortal enemy. So he set himself to inflict all manner of mortifications on me.

"'The pretty little Prince
Who is always kissing his lady love.'

pointed me out to all the fanatics of the party as a monster of debauchery and irreligion. I had but one mistress and I remained true to her. As for irreligion—I leave others in peace; why should they declare war on me?"

"I did not think the Prince capable of so black a deed."

"He is dead and you have made a hero of him. That is the way of the world. He had qualities, he died like a brave man and I pardon him. But at that time he was powerful and it seemed criminal to him that a poor gentleman like myself dared resistance."

The captain paced the room for some time and then continued in a voice of ever-increasing emotion:

"All the ministers, all the fanatics in the army were soon unchained against me. I cared as little for their snarling as for their sermons. One of the Prince's gentlemen, to curry favor, called me a libertine before all our captains. I struck him and later I killed him. There were at least a dozen duels a day in the army and our generals acted as if they did not notice them. They made an exception of me, and the Prince was determined that I should serve as an example to the entire army. The entreaties of all men of quality—including, I am obliged to say, the Admiral—obtained my pardon. But the Prince's hatred was not satisfied. At the battle of Jazeneuil I commanded a company of pistoliers; I had been

*The Reformers chose this color for their party.

in the thick of the skirmish; two bullets had dented my cuirass; my left arm was pierced by a lance, showing that I had not spared myself. I had only twenty men left with me, and a battalion of the King's Swiss Guards marched against us. The Prince of Condé ordered me to charge them—I asked for two companies of Rêitres and—he called me a coward!"

Mergy started up to seize his brother's hand. The captain still continued pacing up and down, his eyes flashing with anger:

"He called me a coward before all those gentlemen in their glittering armor, who a few months later deserted him and left him to be killed at Jarnec. I felt there was nothing left but to die; I dashed at the Swiss, swearing that if by chance I escaped I should never draw sword again for so unjust a Prince. Severely wounded and unhorsed, I was about to be killed when one of the Duke of Anjou's gentlemen named Béville, that madcap with whom we dined, saved my life and introduced me to the Duke. I was well treated. I thirsted for revenge. They cajoled me, they urged me to take service with my benefactor, the Duke of Anjou; they quoted the line:

"'Omne solum forti patria est, ut piscibus aequor.'

"I saw with indignation the Protestants bringing foreigners into our country. But why not tell the only reason that impelled me? I longed for vengeance, and turned Catholic with the hope of meeting the Duke of Condé on the field of battle and killing him. A coward took upon himself to settle my debt. The manner in which he was killed almost made me forget my hatred. I saw him bleeding and the butt of the soldiers' insults; I rescued his body from their hands and flung my mantle over it. I was pledged to the Catholics; I commanded a troop of their cavalry and could not leave them. Luckily, I think I may say I have been some service to my old party. I have tried whenever I could to soften the wrath of religious war, and I was fortunate enough to save the lives of several of my old friends."

"Oliver de Basseville says everywhere that he owes his life to you."

"Now I am a Catholic," said George in a calmer voice. "It is just as good a religion as any other; for it is so easy to accommodate oneself to their pious people! Do you see that pretty Madonna? That is the portrait of an Italian courtesan, and yet fanatics admire my piety as they cross themselves before this false virgin. I think I have easier marching with them than with our ministers. I can live as I please and make very few sacrifices to the opinions of the mob. Good! One must go to mass; I go there from time to time—to look at the pretty women. One must have a confessor—*parbleu!*—mine is a brave Franciscan, a former horse arquebusier; and for a crown he gives me my confession ticket, besides carrying my notes to his pretty penitents. *Mort de ma vie!* The mass forever!"

Mergy was unable to stifle a smile.

"Here," continued the captain, "is my book of masses." And he threw him a book richly bound in a velvet cover and decorated with silver clasps. These 'Hours' are well worth all your books of prayer."

Mergy read on the back: "Hours of the Court."

"The binding is beautiful," he said, with an air of disdain, and returned the book.

The captain opened it and passed it back, smiling. Mergy read on the first page: *The Very Horrific Life of the Great Gargantua, Father of Pantagruel, composed by Monsieur Alcofribus, Extractor of Quintessence.*

"I say! That is a book!" cried the captain with a smile. "I hold it higher than all the books of divinity in the Geneva Library."

"The author of that book had, they say, great learning, but he did not put it to good use."

George shrugged his shoulders.

"Read the book, Bernard, and then you will be able to talk to me about it afterward."

Mergy took the book, and after a moment of silence said:

"I regret that mere indignation, legitimate no doubt, has led you to an act you will some day assuredly repent."

The captain lowered his head, and his eyes, fixed on the rug beneath his feet, seemed to follow out their curious patterns. "What is done is done," he said finally, suppressing a sigh. "Perhaps some day I shall return to the prayer meeting," he continued quite gaily. "But in the meanwhile let us drop that subject and promise me never to talk about anything so tiresome again."

"I hope your own reflections will do more than my lectures or counsels."

"So be it! Now let us talk of your affairs. What was your object in coming to Court?"

"I hope for strong enough introductions to the Admiral to obtain my admission to his men in the campaign he is going to make in Flanders."

"A bad plan. No gentleman who has courage and a sword at his side should of his own free will make a lackey of himself. Volunteer for the Royal Guards; for my own lighthorse troop if you like. You will make the campaign as we all shall, under the Admiral's orders; but at least you will be no one's body servant."

"But I have no desire to join the King's Guards; I had even much rather not. It would please me well to serve in your company, but my father wishes me to make my first campaign under the Admiral's immediate supervision."

"That is like you Huguenots. You preach union and yet bear old grudges worse than we do ours."

"How is that?"

"Why, you still look on the King as a tyrant; an 'Ahab' as your ministers call him. What am I talking about—to you he is not even your King; he is an usurper, and since the death of Louis XIII* it is Gaspard the First, who is King of France."

*Prince Louis of Condé, who was killed at Jarnac, was accused by the Catholics of having designs on the crown. Admiral Coligny's name was Gaspard Châtillon.

"That is an idle jest."

"Well, you may as well serve Old Gaspard as the Duke of Guise, for Monsieur de Châtillon is really a great captain and you will learn your trade under him."

"So even his enemies esteem him," said Mergy.

"Hum! A certain pistol shot was not quite to his credit."

"He has proved his innocence; and, besides, his whole life is utterly out of harmony with Poltrot's cowardly crime."

"Yet," said George, "you know the Latin proverb: *Fecit qui profuit.* Without that pistol shot Orleans would have been captured."

"After all, it was only one man the less in the Catholic army."

"Yes, but such a man! Have you never heard those two rhymes, wretched enough, but better than your psalms—

> "'*Autant que son Guisards demeurés,*
> *Autant a-t-il en France de Mérés!*'"

Poltrot de Méré assassinated the Great Duke Francis de Guise during the siege of Orleans at the moment when the city was reduced to the last extremity. Coligny justified himself very badly from the charge of having allowed, or not prevented, the crime.

"Puerile threats and nothing more. It would be a long list if I were to recite all the crimes of the Guisards."

"As for me—if I were King this is what I would do to restore peace in France: I would place the Guises and the Châtillons in a strong leather sack, well sewed and well tied; then I would throw it into the water with a hundred thousand pounds of iron so that no one could escape. There are several other men I would like to put in the same sack."

"It is fortunate that you are not the King of France."

The conversation now took a more agreeable turn; politics and religion were abandoned and the two brothers told each other all the trifling incidents they had experi-

enced since they separated. Mergy was quite frank about who got the honors in his story of "The Golden Lion Inn"; his brother, laughing heartily at it, made fun of him about the loss of his eighteen crowns and his fine horse. The bells of a neighboring church were now heard.

"*Parbleu!*" cried the captain. "Come to the sermon this evening; I am persuaded that it will amuse you."

"I thank you, but I have no desire to be converted just now."

"Come, my dear fellow, Brother Lubin preaches today. He is a Franciscan, who makes religion so pleasant that a crowd always attends. Besides, the entire Court is going to Saint Jacques today; it is a sight to behold."

"And the Countess de Turgis—will she be there, and will she take off her mask?"

"Apropos: she will not fail to be there. If you wish to stand in line do not forget, when the sermon is over, to wait at the door and offer holy water to her. This is another one of the excellent ceremonies of the Catholic religion. *Dieu!* How many pretty hands I have squeezed! How many billets-doux I have passed while giving this same holy water!"

"Somehow that holy water disgusts me so much that I would not dip my finger into it for anything in the world."

The captain interrupted him with a burst of laughter. Both put on their mantles and went to the church of Saint Jacques, where a splendid and numerous company had already assembled.

CHAPTER V.

THE SERMON.

Bien fendu de gueule, beau despêcher d'Heures, beau desbrideur de messes, beau descrottuer de vigiles; pour tout dire sommairement: vrai moine si oncques en fut, depuis que le monde moinant moina de moinerie.—*Rabelais.*

As Captain George and his brother went about in the church to find a comfortable place near the preacher their attention was arrested by shouts of laughter coming from the sacristy; they went in and discovered a fat man with a jolly red face; clothed in the robe of Saint Francis, who was engaged in a very animated conversation with half a dozen richly dressed young men.

"Come, my children," he said to them, "quick; the women are impatient; give me my text."

"Speak of the good jokes those same women play on their husbands," said one of the young men, whom George immediately recognized as Béville.

"The subject is fertile, I admit, my boy; but what can I say to equal the sermon of the priest of Pontoise, who cried: 'I am going to throw my cap at that one among you who has planted the greatest number of horns on her husband's head!' At which there was not a single woman in the church who did not shield her head with her arm or mantle as if to ward off a blow."

"Oh! Father Lubin," said another; "I only came to the sermon on your account; tell us something lively today; tell us about the sin of love, which is so much the mode at present."

"*A la mode!* Yes, to your mode, messieurs, who are twenty-five; but I have completed full fifty years. At my age one can talk little of love. I have forgotten what the sin means."

"Do not make a prim mouth, Father Lubin; you can discourse about it now as well as ever; we know you."

"Yes, preach about luxury," added Béville; "all the women say you are full of your subject."

The Franciscan answered this pleasantry with a sly wink of his eye to show the pride and pleasure he felt at being upbraided for a young man's vice.

"No; I shall not preach about it, for the women at Court would have no more of me if I showed myself too severe on that subject; and, in all conscience, if I spoke of it at all, it would be to show how one may damn oneself forever—for what—For a minute of pleasure!"

"Well then——Ah! Here is the captain! Come, George; give us a text for the sermon. Father Lubin has engaged to preach on the first subject we suggest to him."

"Yes," said the monk. "But be quick, *mort de ma vie!* I should be in the pulpit right now."

"*Peste!* Father Lubin! You swear as well as the King!" cried George.

"I wager he will not swear during his sermon," said Béville.

"Why not, if the whim seizes me?" replied Father Lubin boldly.

"I wager ten pistoles that you dare not."

"Ten pistoles?—Done!"

"Béville," said the captain, "I will go halves with you."

"No, no!" he replied. "I want to get the good Father's money all to myself; and if he swears, by my faith! I shall not regret my ten pistoles; oaths from a priest are worth fully ten pistoles."

"And I announce to you that I have won the money already," said Father Lubin. "I will begin my sermon with three oaths. Ah, my good young gentlemen, because you carry swords at your sides and plumes in your hats you think you alone know how to swear. We shall see."

As he spoke he went out of the sacristy and instantly mounted the pulpit. Immediately a profound silence fell on the assembly.

The priest glanced over the crowd that assembled about the pulpit as if to discover the one who made the wager, and when he saw him leaning against a pillar straight ahead, he wrinkled his brows, placed his fist on his hip and, with the voice of a man in anger, commenced as follows:

"My dear brothers!—*By the Virtue! By the Death! By the Blood!*——"

A mutter of surprise and indignation interrupted the priest, or rather filled the pause he purposely made.

"——of God," continued the Franciscan with a nasal tone, most devout, "we are saved and delivered from Hell."

A burst of laughter interrupted him a second time. Béville took his purse from his girdle and shook it ostentatiously at the priest, thus admitting that he had lost.

"Good! My brothers," continued the imperturable Father Lubin, "you are well content are you not? *'We are saved and delivered from Hell.'* These are beautiful words you think; we can cross our arms and rejoice. We have rid ourselves from that villainous hell fire. As for the fire of Purgatory, that is only like being singed by a candle to be healed by the oil of a dozen masses. Come, let us eat, drink and go with women. Ah! Hardened sinners that you are! This is how you reason! Now then, it is Brother Lubin who will tell you—you reason without your host!

"Therefore you think, you heretic people, you Huguenots, that it was to deliver you from Hell that our Saviour gladly consented to let himself be nailed to the cross? What folly! Ah! Ah! Truly yes! It is for such rabble that He shed His precious blood! Speaking with due reverence, that would be throwing pearls to swine; and on the contrary, our Saviour threw swine to pearls, for there are pearls in the sea, and our Lord threw into the sea about two thousand swine! And 'behold the whole herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea!' *Bon*

voyage, master pigs! And may all heretics go down the same road!"

The orator coughed and stopped a moment to watch the assembly and enjoy the effects of his eloquence on the devout. He continued:

"Therefore, you Huguenots, be you converted at once —woe betide you! You are neither saved nor delivered from Hell; so turn your heels from the meeting house and cry: 'The mass forever!'

"And you, my dear Catholic brothers, you rub your hands and lick your lips, thinking you are in the suburbs of Paradise. Frankly, my brothers, it is farther from the Court where you live to Paradise, even if you take the short cut, than it is from Saint Lazare to the Porte Saint Denis.

"*The Virtue, the Death and the Blood of God,* have saved you from original sin—agreed; but woe unto you if Satan catches up with you! And I tell you that he goes about seeking whom he may devour!

"Oh, my dear brothers! Satan is one who could teach a trick or two about fencing to Big John, Little John and all the English; and I speak the truth when I say to you that rude are the assaults that he makes upon us!

"Because as soon as we take off our jackets and are breeched—as soon, I say, as we are in case to be guilty of mortal sin—Master Satan challenges us to the Pré-aux-Clercs of this life. The arms we use are the Holy Sacraments; as for him he has an entire arsenal, they are our sins, arms of offense and defense at the same time.

"I seem to see him now, coming to the enclosed ground; his cuirass of *Gluttony* on his body, his spurs are *Idleness,* and *Luxury* is at his girdle. His dagger is *Envy;* he wears *Pride* on his head as a man at arms wears his morion; he keeps *Avarice* in his pocket to use at need; and as for *Anger, Insult* and all that follow them—these he holds in his mouth, from which it is clear to you that he is literally armed to the teeth.

"When God has given the signal, Satan does not like our punctilious duelists, say, 'Monsieur, are you ready?' but plunges, head lowered, against the Christian without crying 'ready!' The Christian, seeing that he is going to receive a thrust from *Gluttony* in the middle of his stomach, parries with *Fasting.*"

Then the priest, to make himself more intelligible, took a crucifix and began to fence with it—lunging the parrying like a fencing master using a foil to demonstrate a difficult stroke.

"Satan in recovering himself gives a slash of *Anger;* then, making a feint with *Hypocrisy,* strikes you *in quart* with a thrust of *Pride.* The Christian next arms himself with *Patience,* and then replies to *Pride* with a thrust of *Humility.* Satan, irritated, immediately gives a blow with the two-edged sword of *Luxury,* but seeing it struck aside by a stroke of *Mortification,* throws his body recklessly upon his adversary, trying at the same time to trip up his legs with *Idleness* and a dagger blow of *Envy,* whilst he tries to stab his heart with *Avarice.* It is then that he needs a sure foot and a sharp eye. With *Labor* the tripping up of *Idleness* is foiled; the dagger of *Envy* is turned by *Love of Our Neighbor,* a very difficult parry my friends; and as for the thrust of *Avarice,* it is *Charity* alone that can turn this blow.

"But, my brothers, how many are there of you who, when attacked thus *in tierce* and *in quart* with slash and thrust, would always be ready to give a parry for all the passes of the enemy? I have seen many a champion beaten to earth and then, if he has not quick recourse to *Contrition,* is done for; and you cannot be too alert in using this last resort. You think, you courtiers, that a *peccavi* does not take long to say. Alas! My brothers, how many poor dying sinners wish to say it and their voice falters at *pec!* And so crack—there goes another soul taken away by the Devil; fetch him back who will."

Brother Lubin kept up this eloquent discourse for a very long time, and when he left the pulpit a connoisseur

of fine style remarked that his sermon, which had lasted scarcely an hour, made thirty-seven distinct points and innumerable flashes of wit resembling those I have cited. Catholics and Protestants alike joined in applauding the priest, who remained long at the foot of the pulpit detained by an eager crowd pressing from all sides of the church to offer their congratulations.

During the sermon Mergy asked several times where the Countess de Turgis was, and his brother looked for her in vain. Either the beautiful Countess had not been in the church or she had hidden herself from admiration in some dark corner.

"I wish," said Mergy as they left, "that all who were present at this absurd sermon could now attend the simple exhortations of one of our ministers."

"There is the Countess de Turgis," the captain whispered, and pressed his arm.

Mergy on turning his head saw a magnificently dressed woman pass quick as lightening through the dark doorway; she was escorted by a blond young man who held her hand; he was short, slight and effeminate, and his costume presented a negligence perhaps studied. The crowd stood aside for them with a promptitude mixed with alarm. The cavalier was the terrible Comminges.

Mergy had hardly time to see the Countess. He was unable to distinguish her features and yet they made a great impression upon him. But he took a mortal dislike to Comminges without knowing why. He was indignant at seeing a man with such a slight figure having such renown.

"If by chance the Countess," he thought, "loved anyone in this crowd that odious Comminges would kill him! He swore to kill all whom she loves." with an involuntary movement he put his hand to the hilt of his sword, but at once he felt ashamed of the act.

"After all, what does it matter to me? I do not envy him his conquest whom I have scarcely seen."

But his thoughts left a painful impression, and afterwards, out on the street from the church to the captain's house, he guarded his silence.

They found supper served. Mergy ate little, and as soon as the table was cleared he wished to return to his inn. The captain consented to his going, but made him promise that he would establish himself finally the next day at his house.

It is not necessary to say that Mergy was supplied by his brother with money, a horse, and so forth; and with the address of the Court tailor and of the only clothier where a gentleman, who was anxious to cut a figure before women, could buy gloves, ruffs *à la confusion,* and his shoes *à cric* or *à point-levis.*

At last when night darkened everything he returned to his inn, accompanied by two of his brother's lackeys, well armed with pistols and swords, for the streets of Paris after eight o'clock in the evening were then more dangerous than the road from Seville to Granada is today.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LEADER OF A PARTY.

Jockey of Norfolk be not too bold,
For Dickon thy master is bought and sold.
SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III.*

Bernard de Mergy on returning to his modest hotel cast his eyes dejectedly at its worn and tarnished furniture. When he compared in his mind the walls of his room, once whitened with chalk, now smoked and black, with the brilliant silk hangings of the rooms he had just left; when he recalled the painting of the beautiful Madonna and saw nothing on his wall but the effigy of an old saint, a very ignoble idea entered his soul. This luxury, this elegance, the favor of women, the good graces of the King and so many other desirable things had cost George but a single word, a word easy to pronounce, for it had only to pass the lips, and it had not penetrated the depths of the heart. At the same time he recollected the names of many other Protestants who by abjuring their religion had been elevated to honor; and as the Devil turns all things to his profit, the parable of the prodigal son recurred to him with this strange moral: that there is more joy over a converted Huguenot than over a persevering Catholic.

These thoughts, which beset him on all sides and in every shape, at length disgusted him. He took up a Geneva Bible which had once belonged to his mother and read it for some time. A little soothed, he put the book down, and before he closed his eyes he tacitly swore to live and die in the religion of his fathers.

In spite of his reading and his oath, his dreams brought to his memory the adventures of the day. He dreamed of purple silk curtains, of golden vessels, then of overturned tables, flashing swords and blood mingled with wine. Then the portrait of the Madonna became ani-

mated; she stepped out of her frame and danced before him. He tried to fix her features in his memory, and for the first time he noticed that she wore a black mask. But her deep blue eyes and two bits of white skin showed through the apertures of the mask! The cords of the mask fell and a heavenly countenance appeared, but without any definite contours; it was the image of his beloved reflected in troubled waters. Involuntarily he lowered his eyes, and when he raised them he saw none other than the terrible Comminges with a bloody sword in his hand.

He arose at an early hour, had his slight baggage taken to his brother's, and, refusing to visit the curiosities of the city, went alone toward the Hôtel de Châtillon to present the Admiral with the letter his father had entrusted to him.

He found the courtyard filled with valets and horses through which he could hardly find a passage to the vast ante chamber thronged with squires and pages, who, though they had no other arms than their swords, nevertheless formed an imposing guard about the Admiral. An attendant in black, turning his eyes upon Mergy's lace collar and the gold chain lent him by his brother, found no difficulty in admitting him at once to the gallery where his master was.

Lords, gentlemen and ministers of the Gospel to the number of more than forty stood with uncovered heads and in respectful attitudes surrounding the Admiral. He wore a very simple suit entirely of black. He was tall, but slightly bowed, and the fatigues of the war had stamped more wrinkles upon his forehead than age; a long white beard fell down upon his breast and his naturally hollow cheeks appeared still more so from a deep scar which was partially hidden by his thick mustache; a pistol shot at the battle of Montcontour had pierced his jaw and likewise destroyed several of his teeth. His expression was rather sad than severe, and it is said that no one ever saw him smile since the death of his brave brother Dandelot. He was leaning over a table covered with maps and plans,

in the middle of which stood an enormous quarto Bible. Toothpicks scattered among the papers recalled a habit for which he was much joked about. At the foot of the table sat a secretary apparently much occupied with writing letters, which he later gave the Admiral to sign.

At the sight of the great man, who counted for more than the King to the religionists of his party, for he united in his person the hero and the saint, Mergy was so strongly affected that he involuntarily bent his knee to the ground. The Admiral, surprised and annoyed at this extraordinary mark of veneration, signaled for him to arise and took the letter handed him by the young enthusiast with some appearance of ill humor. He glanced at the arms on the seal. "Ah! This is from my old comrade, Baron de Mergy," he said, "and from the resemblance you must be his son, young man."

"Monsieur, my father wished to come and pay his respects to you himself, but his great age did not permit him."

"Messieurs," said Coligny after he had read the letter and turned to those about him, "I present to you the son of Baron de Mergy, who has come two hundred leagues to join us. It seems we shall not want for volunteers in Flanders. Messieurs, I entreat your friendship for this young gentleman—you all have the highest esteem for his father."

Bernard instantly received twenty embraces and as many offers of service.

"Have you ever served in battle, Bernard, my friend?" asked the Admiral. "Have you ever heard the noise of arquebus shots?"

Mergy replied, blushing, that he had not yet had the honor of fighting for his religion.

"Rather be happy, young man, that you have not yet had occasion to shed the blood of your countrymen," said Coligny gravely. "Thank God," he added with a sigh, "the civil war is over! Religion breathes, and, more for-

tunate than ourselves, you will only draw your sword against the enemies of your King and your country."

Then, putting his hand on the young man's shoulder:

"I am sure," he said, "that you will not belie the blood from which you sprang. It is your father's intention that you first serve with my gentlemen; and whenever you meet the Spaniards and take a standard from them you shall at once receive the rank of cornet in my regiment."

"I swear," answered Mergy resolutely, "that on the first action I shall be a cornet or my good father will lose a son."

"Spoken like your father, my brave boy;" then, calling his steward, "This is my *intendant,* Master Samuel; and if he has need of gold for his equipment, furnish him with it."

The steward bowed to Mergy, who eagerly expressed his thanks and his refusal.

"My father and my brother," he said, "have provided amply for my support."

"Your brother? Is he not Captain George Mergy who adjured his religion in the first war?"

Mergy bowed his head sadly; his lips moved, but one could not hear his response.

"He is a brave soldier," continued the Admiral, "but what is courage without the fear of God? Young man, you have in your family a model to imitate and an example to shun."

"I shall endeavor to imitate my brother in his courageous conduct and not in his change."

"Well, Bernard, come to see me often; make use of me as a friend. You are not in the best place for the improvement of your morals, but I soon hope to lead you where you may gain glory."

Mergy bowed respectfully and retired into the circle of gentlemen surrounding the Admiral.

"Messieurs," said Coligny, resuming the conversation which the arrival of Mergy interrupted, "I hear good

news everywhere. The assassins of Rouen have been punished."

"But those of Toulouse have not," said an old minister with a somber and fanatical expression.

"You are mistaken, monsieur. The news of that has just arrived. Moreover, the *chambre mi-partie* is established in Toulouse.* Every day His Majesty gives us additional proofs that his justice is extended to all."

The old minister shook his head with an air of incredulity.

An old man with a white beard, clothed in black velvet, cried out:

"His justice equally extended! Yes! Châtillons, Montmorencys and Guises: Charles and his worthy mother would willingly put an end to the whole tribe of them at once."

"Speak more respectfully of the King, Monsieur de Bonissan," said Coligny in a severe tone. "Forget once for all our old differences. Do not let it be said that the Catholics practice the divine precept of forgiveness for injuries better than we ourselves."

"By my father's bones! They would find that an easier task than we," muttered Bonissan. "Twenty-three of my nearest relatives martyred!—that does not easily escape my memory."

He was speaking in this bitter tone when a very infirm old man with a repulsive face and wrapped in a shabby mantle entered the gallery, pushed through the crowd and placed a sealed paper in the hands of Coligny.

"Who are you?" asked the latter without breaking the seal.

"One of your friends," replied the old man in a hoarse voice. He left the room at once.

"I saw that man leave the Hôtel de Guise this morning," said one gentleman.

*By the treaty which ended the Third Civil War chambers of justice were established in several parliaments of which half the councellors professed the Calvinist religion. They were entrusted with handling the differences between Catholics and Protestants.

"He is a magician," said another.

"A poisoner," added a third.

"The Duke of Guise has sent him to poison the Admiral."

"Poison me, gentlemen!" said Coligny, and shrugged his shoulders; "poison me by a letter!"

"Remember the gloves sent to the Queen of Navarre!" cried Bonissan.*

"I believe neither in poisoned gloves nor in poisoned letters, but I think the Duke of Guise capable of such villany."

He was about to open the letter when Bonissan rushed forward and seizing his hands, cried out:

"Do not open it or you will breathe a mortal poison!"

All present crowded around the Admiral, who tried to free himself from Jean Bonissan in vain.

"I see a dark vapor rising from that letter," said some one.

"Throw it down! Throw it down!" was the general cry.

"Let me alone, fools that you are," said the Admiral struggling. During the scuffle the paper fell to the floor.

"Samuel, my friend," cried Bonissan, "show yourself a good servant. Open the letter for me and do not give it to your master until you are assured it contains nothing suspicious."

The commission was not to the steward's liking. Mergy took the letter without hesitation and broke the seal. As soon as he did so he found himself alone in the center of a wide circle; each of the attendants had receded as if a bomb had exploded amongst them. However, no evil vapor arose; no one even sneezed. A very soiled paper, on which were scrawled a few lines, was all the packet contained.

*Jeanne d'Albert, wife of Anthony, King of Navarre and mother of Henry IV. "Her death was caused by a poison conveyed to her brain by perfumed gloves made by Messer René, a Florentine, who afterward was execrated even by the enemies of that princess," says Aubigné. (Histoire universelle, tome 1; chap. 2.)

The same men who were the first to withdraw were also the first to advance with smiling faces as soon as all hazard of danger had vanished.

"What does this impertinence mean?" cried Coligny angrily, freeing himself from the grasp of Bonissan. "What! Open a letter addressed to me!"

"My lord, if by chance the letter contained any poison subtle enough to have killed you upon inhalation it would be better that a young man such as I should fall as its victim than you, whose existence is so precious to religion."

A murmer of admiration arose about him. Coligny grasped his hand with emotion and after a moment of silence:

"Since you have taken the trouble to open the letter," he said, "read us what it contains."

Mergy immediately read as follows:

"The heavens are blazing in the west with bloody fires. The stars have disappeared from the firmament and flaming swords have been seen in the air. He must be blind who cannot foresee what these signs presage. Gaspard! Gird on your sword, put spurs to your horse or the *geais* (jays) will feed on your flesh in a few days."

"He means the Guises by these *geais,*" said Bonissan; "the name of the bird is written instead of the letter, which is pronounced the same."

The Admiral shrugged his shoulders disdainfully and all remained silent; it was evident, however, that the prophecy had produced a certain impression upon the assembly.

"How many people there are in Paris who are interested in this foolishness!" said Coligny, frigidly; "They say, do they not, that there are at least ten thousand rascals who live in no other way than by predicting what is to come?"

"The advice, questionable as it is, should not be neglected," said an infantry officer. "The Duke of Guise

has publicly declared that he could not sleep quietly until he ran you through the body with his sword."

"It would be easy for an assassin to reach you," added Bonissan. "Were I in your place I would always wear a cuirass when I went to the Louvre."

"Listen, my comrade," answered the Admiral; "assassins do not trouble old soldiers such as you and I. They have more fear of us than we of them."

He talked for some time about the approaching campaign in Flanders and affairs of his religion. Several persons presented petitions for him to place before the King; he received them all kindly and addressed each solicitor with affable words. Ten o'clock struck and he called for his hat and gloves to go to the Louvre. Some of his attendants then took leave of him; a greater number followed him as a kind of bodyguard.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LEADER OF A PARTY—THE COMMISSION.

As soon as the captain saw his brother he ran to him, crying:

"Well, now! Have you seen Gaspard the First? How did he receive you?"

"With a kindness I can never forget."

"I am very glad to hear it."

"Oh! George, what a man he is!"

"What a man! A man very like other men with a little more ambition and a little more patience than my lackey, not to speak of the difference in birth—De Châtillon's pedigree has done wonders for him."

"Did his pedigree teach him the art of war and make him the first captain of our time?"

"Doubtless not, but his merit has not prevented him from being beaten. Bah! Let us say no more about that. You have seen Coligny today, that is fine; all honor to the man. And you have begun to make your court to Monsieur de Châtillon. Now—will you go hunting tomorrow? I will present you to one who is worth seeing; I speak of Charles, King of France."

"What! I go hunting with the King?"

"Why not? There you will see the handsomest women and the finest horses of the Court. The rendezvous is at the Château of Madrid and we must be there early—you shall have my roan saddle horse and I promise you he will keep up with the hounds without need of spurs."

A lackey handed Mergy a letter just delivered by one of the King's pages. Mergy opened it, and to his surprise and that of his brother, it was found to contain a cornet's commission. The seal of the King was attached and the paper was filled out in due form.

"Peste!" cried George, "this is an unexpected favor.

but how the Devil comes it that Charles IX, who does not know you exist, sends you a cornet's brevet?"

"I suppose I am obliged to the Admiral for it," said Mergy. He then told the story of the mysterious letter which he had so courageously opened. The captain laughed heartily at the adventure and joked him pitilessly about it.

CHAPTER VIII

A DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE AUTHOR AND THE READER

"Ah! Mr. Author, what a splendid opportunity you now have for painting portraits! And such portraits! You will take us to the Château of Madrid and in the midst of that Court. What a scene! Will you tell us about that Franco-Italian Court? Will you introduce us to all the characters with which it was distinguished? How much we shall learn! And how interesting the day passed with so many great personages!"

"Alas! Mr. Reader, what is this you ask of me? I wish I had the talent for writing a history of France; in that event I would not write romance. But tell me why you wish me to introduce you to men who play no part in my romance?"

"But you make a great mistake not to let them play a part. What! You carry me back to the year 1572 and expect to get out of giving the portraits of all these remarkable men! Come! No delay. Commence; I shall give you the first sentence: 'The door of the salon opened and there appeared——!'"

"But, Mr. Reader, there were no salons at the Château of Madrid; the salons——"

"Very well then! 'The great hall was crowded—and—among those one might discover'—and so on——"

"Who did you say might be discovered?"

"*Parbleu!* First of all, Charles IX!"

"And second?"

"Stop. First describe his costume, then sketch his appearance for me, and finally a portrait of his character. That is the grand style of making all novels."

"His costume? He was dressed like a hunter, with a great hunter's horn slung around his neck."

"You are brief."

"As to his physical portrait—listen—I give you my word, you had much better go and look at his bust in the Angoulême Museum. It is in the second room, No. 98."

"But, Mr. Author, I live in the country; would you make me come to Paris expressly to see a portrait bust of Charles IX?"

"Well then! Picture to yourself a young man rather well built with his head set fairly deep between his shoulders; his neck stretched out; his head leaning forward in an awkward manner; his nose a little large; his lips thin and long with the upper one advancing a trifle; his complexion pale and his large green eyes never looking at those of the person to whom he speaks. For the rest you will never see 'Saint Bartholomew,' nor anything like it written in his eyes. Not for a moment; his expression is only somewhat stupid and restless rather than hard and savage. You may picture it to yourself in thinking of a young Englishman entering a large drawing room alone where everyone else is seated. He walks through a double row of well-dressed women who cease speaking as he passes; after entangling himself with the dresses of one, jostling the chair of another, having the utmost difficulty in reaching the hostess—then, and not until then, he sees that on leaving his carriage he has rubbed the sleeve of his coat against the wheel and it is covered with mud. You must have seen such dismayed faces; perhaps, in fact, you may have seen yourself reflected in some looking-glass before the habit of going out into society made you indifferent to the effect of your entrance."

"And Catherine de Medicis?"

"Catherine de Medicis! *Diable!* If I had so much as thought of her! I think it is the last time I shall have to mention her name; she was a stout, florid woman, rather well preserved for her age as they say, with a thick nose and pinched lips like those of a person who feels the first attacks of sea-sickness. Her eyes are

half shut, she yawns constantly, and her voice is monotonous and can say with the same inflection: 'Ah! Who will rid me that odious Bearnese?' And 'Madeline, give some sugared cream to my Naples dog.'"

"Fine! But please make her say a few words a little more noteworthy. She has just poisoned Jeanne D'Albret, at least so the story runs, and that should be noticed."

"Not at all; because if that were noticed where would her celebrated dissimulation be? On that day, if I am correctly informed, she talked of nothing but the weather the entire time."

"And Henry IV? And Marguerite of Navarre? Show us Henry the brave, gallant and good in every way; Marguerite slipping a note into the hand of a page, while Henry for his part presses the fingers of one of the maids of honor to Catherine."

"As for Henry IV, no one could discern in that small, thoughtless youngster the future hero and King of France. He has already forgotten his mother, but a fortnight dead. He speaks only to a whipper-in, engaged in a conversation about the scent of the stag to be started. I shall spare you that, especially as I hope you are no sportsman."

"And Marguerite?"

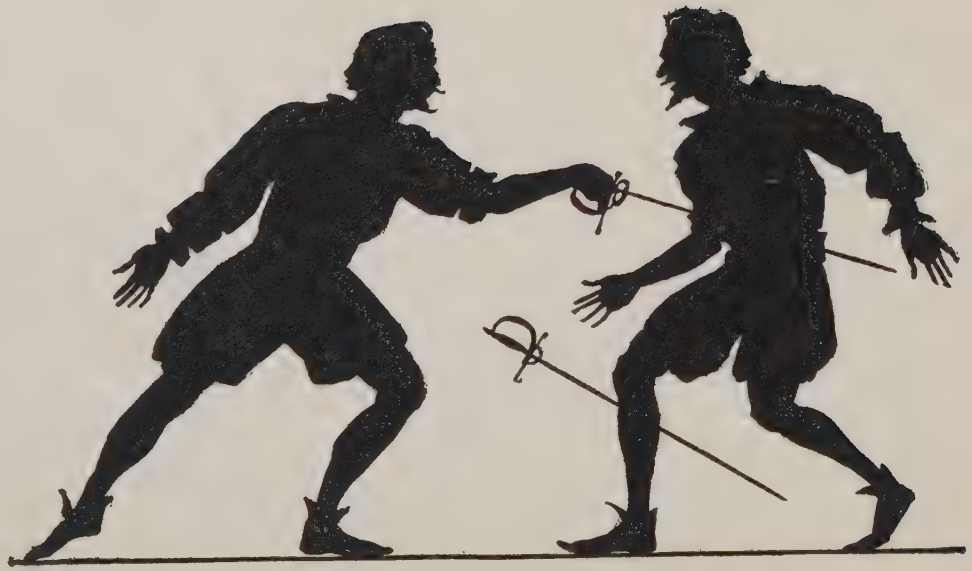
"She was a trifle indisposed and kept to her room."

"A good way to get rid of her. And the Duke of Anjou? And the Prince of Condé? And the Duke of Guise? And Tavannes, Retz, La Rochefoucauld and Téligny? And Thoré? And Méru? and all the others?"

"My word! You know them better than I do. I wish to speak of my friend Mergy."

"Ah! I fear I shall not find what I want in this story of yours."

"I fear so, too."



CHAPTER IX

THE GLOVE

Cayo un escarpin de la derecha
Mano, que de la izquierda importa poco,
A la senora Blanca, y amor loco
A dos fidalgos disparo la flecha.
LOPE DE VEGA, *El guante de Doña Blanca.*

The Court was assembled at the Chateau de Madrid. The Queen Mother, surrounded by her ladies, waited in the room where the King was to breakfast before getting on horseback; and the King, followed by the princes, was slowly crossing a gallery where all the gentlemen who were to follow the hunt had gathered. He listened inattentively to the speeches of his courtiers and often answered them curtly. As he passed by the two brothers the captain bent one knee and presented the new cornet. Mergy, bowing profoundly, thanked His Majesty for the honor he received before doing anything to merit it.

"Ah! You are he of whom my father the Admiral spoke. You are Captain George's brother?"

"Yes, Sire."

"Are you Catholic or Huguenot?"

"Sire, I am a Protestant."

"I only ask out of curiosity; because the Devil take me if I care to what religion they belong who serve me well."

After saying these memorable words the King turned into the Queen's apartments.

A few minutes later a bevy of ladies spread themselves about the gallery; evidently they were sent to keep up the patience of the sportsmen. I shall mention but one in that Court filled with beauty; I speak of the Countess de Turgis, who plays a great part in this story. She wore a riding costume of a dashing and handsome style, and had not yet put on her mask. Her complexion of brilliant

whiteness, and uniformly pale, set off her jet-black hair; her well-arched eyebrows, just meeting in the middle, gave her a look of austerity, or pride rather, without destroying the charm of her features as a whole. At first her large, blue eyes gave one the impression of haughty disdain; but when she talked with animation the large pupils were soon seen to dilate like those of a cat; her glance lightened up and it was difficult for even the most hardened coxcomb to resist their magic for any length of time.

"The Countess de Turgis! How beautiful she is today!" the courtiers whispered among themselves. And each pressed forward to see her the better. Mergy, who was directly in her path, was so struck with her beauty that he remained motionless and had no thought of standing aside until the wide silken sleeves of the Countess touched his doublet.

She noticed his emotion with possible pleasure and deigned for a moment to fix her lovely eyes upon his, which fell at once, while his cheeks became a vivid crimson. The Countess smiled and as she passed she dropped one of her gloves in front of our hero, who, still motionless and entranced, never thought of picking it up. Immediately a blond young man, none other than Comminges who followed behind Mergy, pushed rudely past him, seized the glove and, after kissing it devoutly, returned it to Madame de Turgis. Without thanking him she turned to Mergy at whom she stared for a long time with an expression of withering contempt; then she noticed Captain George near him.

"Captain," she said very haughtily, "tell me where this tall simpleton comes from? Surely, to judge by his courtesy, he must be a Huguenot."

A general burst of laughter completed the confusion of the unfortunate who was the object of the remark.

"That is my brother, madame," George replied, not quite so loud. "He has been in Paris only three days,

and on my honor he is no more awkward than Lannoy was before you took him in hand."

The Countess reddened a little.

"Captain, that was an ill-timed jest. Speak no evil of the dead. Come, give me your hand; I have a message for you from a lady who is not quite satisfied with you."

The captain took her by the hand ceremoniously and led her to a window seat at a little distance, and as she went she turned back to look once more at Mergy.

While he was still enchanted by the beautiful apparition at which he wished to gaze but to which he did not dare to raise his eyes, Mergy felt a gentle tap on his shoulder. He turned and saw Baron de Vaudreuil, who took his hand and led him aside that they might, he said, talk without fear of interruption.

"My dear friend," the Baron began, "you are entirely a newcomer in this section and perhaps you do not know how to conduct yourself here."

Mergy looked at him with an air of astonishment.

"Your brother is engaged and cannot advise you; if you will allow me, I shall take his place."

"I do not know, Monsieur, what——"

"You have been grossly insulted, and as you are in a pensive mood I have no doubt that you plan means for your revenge."

"My revenge? And on whom?" asked Mergy, blushing to his eyes.

"Have you not been rudely jostled just now by little Comminges! The entire Court saw the affair and expects you to take it to heart."

"But," said Mergy, "in so crowded a hall where everybody in the world is assembled it is not extraordinary that some one pushed me accidentally."

"Monsieur de Mergy, I have not the honor of knowing you well, but your brother is my best friend and he will tell you that I practice, whenever it is possible, the divine precept of forgiveness for injuries. I do not wish to involve you in an unnecessary quarrel, but at the same

time I think it my duty to tell you that Comminges did not push you by accident. He pushed you because he wished to insult you; and if he had not pushed you, he has still given you cause for offense, because by picking up the glove of la Turgis he intruded upon a privilege belonging to you. The glove fell at your feet, ergo, you alone had the right to pick it up and return it. Besides, you have only to lift your head and see Comminges at the end of the gallery pointing his finger in scorn at you."

Mergy, on turning, did see Commingès in a group of five or six young men telling some story to which they listened and laughed with interest. Nothing proved that he was the subject of conversation, but upon hearing the words of his charitable councellor Mergy felt his heart fill with violent rage.

"I shall meet him after the hunt," he said, "and I shall discover——"

"Oh! Never delay a good resolution of this kind; moreover, you offend God much less by challenging your adversary under the influence immediately following the injury than after you have had time to reflect. In a moment of excitement you arrange a rendezvous for a duel—that is only a venial sin; and if you do fight later it is only to avoid a much greater sin—that of breaking your word. But I forget, I am speaking to a Protestant. No matter, challenge him without delay; I shall arrange it at once."

"I hope that he will not refuse me the necessary apologies."

"Do not deceive yourself about that, my comrade. Comminges has never said: 'I was in the wrong.' He is a brave man, however, and will give you full satisfaction."

Mergy made an effort to calm his emotion and assumed an air of indifference.

"If I have been insulted," he said, "I must have satisfaction. Whatever it is I shall insist on it."

"Good, *mon brave,* I like your audacity, for you can-

not be ignorant that Comminges is one of our best swordsmen. By my faith! He is a gentleman who handles his sword well. He took lessons at Rome from Brambilla, and little Jean will not fence with him any more."

As he said this he looked keenly at the somewhat pale face of Mergy who seemed rather more angry at the insult than afraid of its results.

"I should like to serve as your second in this affair; but not to mention that tomorrow is the day I receive sacrament, I also am pledged to Monsieur de Rheincy and cannot draw a sword against anyone else."

(It was a matter of principle with a *raffiné* never to enter upon a new quarrel until a former was settled.)

"I thank you, monsieur; but if we come to extremities my brother will serve as my second."

"The captain is very experienced in such affairs. Meanwhile I shall bring Comminges to you for an explanation."

Mergy bowed, and turning to the wall employed his time in preparing the terms of the challenge and composing his features.

There is a certain graceful manner in making a challenge which, like a good many other things, is acquired by habit. This was our hero's first affair, so consequently he felt a little embarrassed; but at the present moment he was much less afraid of receiving a sword thrust than of saying something unbecoming of a gentleman. He had scarcely turned in his mind the firm yet polite sentence when Baron de Vaudreuil put his hand on his arm and made him forget it completely.

Comminges, hat in hand and bowing with most insolent politeness, said to him in a honeyed voice:

"You wish to speak to me, monsieur?"

Anger flashed red on Mergy's face; he answered at once and in a firmer voice than he hoped for:

"You have conducted yourself toward me with impertinence and I demand satisfaction from you."

Vaudreuil nodded his approbation. Comminges straightened up; he placed his hand on his hip, the proper posture in such cases, and said with great gravity:

"You present yourself as the challenger, monsieur; and I as the challenged have the choice of arms."

"Name those most convenient for you."

Comminges pretended to reflect a moment.

"The estoc,"* he said, is a good weapon but the wounds it makes are disfiguring and, at our age," he added smiling, "one does not care to show a scar in the middle of one's face to one's mistress. The rapier makes only a small hole, but it is sufficient," and he smiled again. "I chose, then, the rapier and poniard."

"Very well," said Mergy. And he turned to leave.

"One moment!" cried Vaudreuil; "you have not agreed on the meeting place."

"All the Court goes to the Pré-aux-Clercs," said Comminges, "and if, monsieur, you have another place you prefer——?"

"At the Pré-aux-Clercs be it."

"And the hour? I shall not rise until after eight o'clock for personal reasons—you understand. Nor do I sleep at home tonight, and I could hardly get to the Pré-aux-Clercs before nine."

"At nine o'clock then."

Mergy on turning his eyes away saw, close to him, the Countess de Turgis, who had left the captain and was talking to another woman. One can easily understand that at the sight of the fair cause of this fatal affair our hero assumed an expression of gravity and indifference.

"For some time past," said Vaudreuil, "the mode has been to duel in scarlet breeches. If you have not a pair ready made I can lend you mine. Blood does not show on them and it is most correct."

"That seems childish to me," said Comminges.

Mergy smiled with a bad grace.

"Well then, my friends," said the Baron deVaudreuil,

Estoc: *A large two-edged sword.

who appeared quite in his element, "we have nothing more to do than to arrange seconds and thirds for the meeting."

(The seconds were often not mere spectators but fought themselves. The expressions "to second" and "to third" some one were in use.)

"Monsieur is a newcomer at Court," said Comminges, "and perhaps may have a little difficulty in finding a third; so I shall be content with a second out of consideration for him."

With some difficulty Mergy forced his lips into a sort of smile.

"Nothing could be more courteous," said the Baron. "And indeed it is a pleasure to have an affair with a gentleman so accommodating as Monsieur de Comminges."

"As you need a rapier the same length as mine," said Comminges, "I recommend to you Laurent at the 'Golden Sun' in the Rue de la Ferronière; he is the best armorer in the city. Tell him that I sent you and he will serve you well."

As he finished the words he pirouetted about very calmly and returned to the group of young men he had just left.

"I congratulate you, Bernard," said Vaudreuil; "you managed your challenge excellently. It is good, very good! Comminges is not accustomed to such words. They fear him like fire, especially since he killed tall Canillac; for as Saint Michel, whom he also killed two months ago, said, there was no great honor in that. Saint Michael had no practice, whereas Canillac had already killed his man five or six times without a scratch. He studied at Naples under Borelli; and they say that Lansac, on his death-bed, left him the secret of the pass with which he did so much harm. To tell the truth," he continued as if talking to himself, "Canillac pillaged the church of Auxerre and cast the host to earth, so it is not surprising that he was punished."

Mergy, who found little amusement in these particulars, felt, however, obliged to talk for fear that some suspicion unfavorable to his courage should come in to Vaudreuil's mind.

"Happily," he said, "I never pillaged a church and in my entire life I have never so much as touched the host, so I have far less to fear."

"I wish to give you one more counsel. When you cross swords with Comminges take especial care of one of his feints which cost Captain Tamaso his life. He cried out that his sword point was broken. Tomaso then raised his sword above his head expecting a cut; but Comminges' blade was entirely sound, for it went within a foot from the hilt in Tomaso's breast which he left unguarded, not expecting a thrust from the point. But as you are used to rapiers, there will be less danger of this."

"I shall do my best."

"Ah! But listen once more. Choose a poniard with a solid shell; it is invaluable for parrying. Do you see that scar on my left hand? It is there because I went without my poinard one day. Young Tallard and I quarreled and I almost lost my left hand for lack of a poinard."

"And was he wounded?" asked Mergy absently.

"I killed him, thanks to a vow I made to Monseigneur Saint Maurice, my patron. Take lint and linen with you also; it will do no harm. One is not always killed outright. And it would be well to have your sword put on the altar during mass—but you are a Protestant. And one word more: make no point of honor about breaking ground; on the contrary, let him exercise, he lacks breath; pump him; and when you get a chance, a good lunge in the chest and your man is done for."

He might have continued this excellent advice much longer had not a loud blast from the horns announced that the King was about to take horse. The door of the

Queen's apartments opened and their Majesties in hunting costume went to the staircase.

Captain George, who had left his companion, approached his brother and clapping him on the shoulder said cheerfully:

"By the mass! You are a lucky rascal! Do you see this young man with kitten's whiskers? He no sooner shows himself than all the women are mad about him. Do you know your fair Countess has been talking to me about you a full quarter of an hour? Come, courage! Gallop always at her side during the hunt and be as gallant as you can. But what the Devil ails you? One might think you were ill; your face is as long as a minister's at the stake. Come! *Morbleu,* show some spirit!"

"I have no great desire to go to the hunt and I wish ——."

"If you do not hunt," Vaudreuil said very low, "Comminges will think you are afraid to meet him."

"Come along then," said Mergy, and he passed his hand over his heated brow. He reflected that he had better see the hunt to the finish before telling his brother of his adventures.

"What shame!" he mused, "if Madams de Turgis thought me afraid—or if she believed that the idea of an appreaching duel spoiled my pleasure in the hunt."

CHAPTER X.

THE HUNT.

Mercutio: The very butcher of a silk button; a duelist; a gentleman of the very first house—of the first and second cause: ah! the immortal *passado!* the *punto reverso!*—SHAKESPEARE, *Romeo and Juliet.*

A great assembly of women and men richly dressed and mounted on superb horses were riding in all directions about the courtyard of the château. The fanfare of the horns, the barking of the hounds and the boisterous pleasantries of the courtiers formed a din delightful to the ears of the sportsman and execrable to all other human ears.

Mergy mechanically followed his brother into the courtyard and, without knowing how, found himself near the beautiful Countess, who was already masked and mounted on a superb Andalusian horse that pawed the earth and impatiently champed at its bit; but the horse, which would have occupied the entire attention of the average rider, was perfectly under her command, and she seemed as much at her ease and unconcerned as if she were reclining in a chair in her own apartment.

The captain approached under the pretext of tightening the curb of the Andalusian.

"Here is my brother," he said to the Amazon in an undertone, but also loud enough to be heard by Mergy. "Treat the poor boy kindly; he has been dejected ever since he saw you on a certain day at the Louvre."

"I have already forgotten his name," she answered brusquely. "What is his name?"

"Bernard. Do you notice that his scarf is the same color as your ribbons?"

"Does he ride well?"

"You may judge for yourself."

He saluted and rode towards one of the maids of honor to the Queen, to whom he had been attentive for some

time. Half reclining in an arc over his saddle and holding the bridle of the maid's horse, he soon forgot his brother and his beautiful but proud companion.

"You know Comminges, Monsieur de Mergy?" asked Madame de Turgis.

"I, Madame?—very slightly," he replied, hesitating.

"But you were speaking to him just now."

"It was for the first time."

"I think I can guess what you were saying to him." And her eyes, through her mask, seemed to read to the bottom of Mergy's soul.

A woman, addressing the Countess, interrupted the conversation, to Mergy's great satisfaction, for he was greatly embarrassed. Nevertheless, he continued to follow the Countess without in the least knowing why; perhaps it was to vex Comminges, who watched at a distance.

They emerged from the château. A stag was started and it plunged into the forest; the entire company set off in pursuit and Mergy saw, not without some astonishment, the skill of Madame de Turgis in controlling her horse and the boldness with which she cleared every obstacle in her way. Mergy, because of the excellence of his horse, did not become separated from her; but to his great annoyance Comminges, as well mounted as he, also kept pace with her, so, in spite of the rapidity of his headlong gallop and in spite of the special attention he seemed to give to the chase, he often managed to speak to the Amazon, whilst Mergy in silence envied his ease, his insouciance and especially his talent for saying agreeable trifles which, as well as the displeasure it gave him, seemed to amuse the Countess. Otherwise the two rivals were inspired with a noble emulation and found no fences too high nor ditches too wide to stop their course, and risked breaking their necks twenty times.

Suddenly the Countess, leaving the main body of hunters, turned off into a lane in the woods at an angle to that in which the King and his company were riding.

"Where are you going?" cried Comminges; "you are losing the way; do you not hear the hounds and the horn?"

"Well, then, take the other lane; who prevents you?"

Comminges did not reply and followed. Mergy did likewise, and when they had galloped briskly for a hundred paces the Countess slowed the gait of her horse. Comminges to her right and Mergy to her left imitated her at once.

"You have a fine battle horse, Monsieur de Mergy," said Comminges; "he did not turn a hair."

"He is a barb that a Spaniard sold to my brother. See the mark of a sword cut that he received at Montcontour."

"Have you ever been in battle?" the Countess asked Mergy.

"No, madame."

"Then you have never faced the bullets of an arquebus?"

"No, madame."

"Nor sword cuts?"

"Nor those either."

Mergy thought she seemed to smile. Comminges twirled his mustache in a bantering manner.

"Nothing is so becoming to a young gentleman," he said, "as a beautiful slash. What do you say, madame?"

"Yes, if it has been well earned."

"What do you mean by well earned?"

"That a wound is glorious if gained on the field of battle, but in a duel the case is not the same; I know nothing more despicable."

"Monsieur de Mergy, I suppose, has been talking to you before you mounted."

"No," said the Countess drily.

Mergy guided his horse beside that of Comminges:

"Monsieur," he said, in a low voice, "as soon as we have rejoined the hunt we can turn aside into a quiet

place and there I hope to prove that I have no wish to avoid a meeting with you."

Comminges looked at him with an air of pity and approval.

"Good; I believe you," he replied, "but it is not possible for me to accept the proposal you make; we are not a pair of boors to go off and fight entirely alone; and our friends, if they were robbed of their share of the sport, would never pardon us for not allowing them to attend."

"As you please, monsieur," said Mergy. And he resumed his place next to Diane de Turgis, who had led her horse a little ahead of them. The Countess bowed her head to her bosom and seemed entirely lost in her thoughts. The three went on in silence until they reached an open space at the end of the lane, where several other lanes crossed.

"Is that not the horn we hear?" said Comminges.

"It seems to me the sound came from our left," said Mergy.

"Yes, that is really the horn; I am certain of it, and a Bologna bugle at that. *Dieu me damne!* If it is not the horn of my friend Pompignan. You have no idea, Monsieur de Mergy, of the difference between a Bologna bugle and one made by the wretched artisans of Paris."

"It is indeed very loud."

"But such tones! What clear notes! The hounds forget the fatigue of a ten-league course when they hear it. Really, to tell the truth, nothing good is made except in Italy and Flanders. Do you see this Walloon neck ruff? How well it suits a hunting costume; I have collars and frills *à la confusion* for balls, but this collar, simple as it is, do you think I could procure it in Paris? No. I bought it in Breda. If you wish I shall get you some also from a friend I have in Flanders. But——" He interrupted himself with a laugh. "What am I doing? *Mon dieu!* I actually forgot!"

The Countess halted her horse.

"Comminges, the hunters are ahead of us, and to judge from the horn the stag is at bay."

"Fair lady, I agree with you."

"And will you not be in at the death?"

"Certainly, our reputation as hunters and riders is at stake."

"Good! Then lose no time."

"Yes, our horses have had time to breathe. Come! Give the word."

"But I am tired, I shall rest here. Monsieur de Mergy will keep me company. Now go."

"But——"

"But must I speak twice? Spur on."

Comminges was motionless; crimson mounted to his face and he looked from Mergy to the Countess with a furious expression.

"Madame de Turgis wishes a *tête-à-tête,*" he said, with a sour smile.

The Countess motioned with her hand toward the plantation from which the sound of the horn came and pointed significantly.

Still Comminges did not seem disposed to leave the field free to his rival.

"It seems that I have to explain myself still more clearly to you. Leave us, Monsieur de Comminges; your presence is inopportune! Do you understand me now?"

"Perfectly, madame," he replied in a fury. And he added in a lower tone: "As for this minion of yours—he shall not amuse you much longer. *Adieu!* Monsieur de Mergy, *au revoir!*" He laid particular stress on the last words; then putting spurs to his horse he rode off at a gallop.

The Countess checked her horse, which started to follow its companion, bringing it to a walk; and for a while rode in silence, raising her head from time to time to look at Mergy as if to speak, then turning her eyes away as if at a loss to find a phrase with which to start.

Mergy thought it devolved upon him to begin.

"I am very proud, madame, of the preference you accord me."

"Monsieur Bernard—do you know how to fence?"

"Yes, madame," he answered with surprise.

"But I mean well—very well?"

"Well enough for a gentleman, though badly enough, no doubt, for a fencing master."

"But in our part of the country the gentlemen are more skilful with the sword than professional fencing masters."

"In fact, I understand that many of our youths waste the time in fencing rooms that they might spend better elsewhere."

"Better?"

"Yes, certainly. Is it not better to talk to women," he added, smiling, "than to perspire in a fencing room?"

"Tell me, have you fought often?"

"Never, by God's grace, madame! But why these questions?"

"Learn for your future instruction that one must never ask a woman why she does this or that; at least this is the rule among well-bred gentlemen."

"I shall conform to it," said Mergy, and smiling slightly he bowed to his horse's mane.

"Then—what will you do tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow?"

"Yes; do not act astonished."

"Madame——"

"Answer me, I know everything; answer!" she cried, with a queenly gesture of her hand toward him. The tip of her finger touched Mergy's sleeve and made him start.

"I shall do my best," he said finally.

"I like your answer; it is neither that of a coward nor a braggart. But you know that for your début you have selected a very formidable man."

"What would you have? I shall no doubt be very embarrassed, as I am now," he added, smiling. "I have only seen peasant girls heretofore, and now on my en-

trance at Court I find myself *tête-à-tête* with the most beautiful woman of the Court of France."

"Let us speak seriously. Comminges is the finest swordsman at a Court fertile with *coupe-jarrets*. He is the King of the *Raffinés*."

"So they say."

"Well, then! Do you not feel uneasy?"

"I can only repeat that I shall do my best. One need never despair with a good sword and, above all, with the aid of God!"

"The aid of God——" she interrupted scornfully; "are you not a Huguenot, Monsieur de Mergy?"

"Yes, madame," he replied gravely, as was his custom in answering this question.

"Then you take a risk that is greater than another's."

"And why?"

"To expose one's life is nothing; but you expose more than your life—you expose your soul."

"You reason, madame, according to the ideas of your religion; mine are more reassuring."

"You are going to play a desperate game. An eternity of suffering on one throw of the dice and all six sides are against you!"

"In either case it would be the same; because if I die tomorrow as a Catholic I should die in mortal sin."

"There is a great deal to be said about that, and the difference is vast," she cried, piqued that Mergy should oppose her by an argument from her own religion. "Our doctors will explain to you——"

"Oh, no doubt; for they explain everything, madame; they take the liberty of changing the Evangelists to suit their fancies. For example——"

"Let that rest! One cannot talk a moment to a Huguenot without his citing the Holy Scriptures on all subjects."

"That is because we read them, while you—why, your own priests do not even read them. But we shall change

the subject. Do you think that the stag is taken by this time?"

"Then you are deeply attached to your religion?"

"It is you who begin this time, madame."

"You think it a good one,"

"Much more—I think it the best, the only good; I should change it otherwise."

"Your brother changed."

"He had reasons for becoming a Catholic; I have mine for remaining a Protestant."

"They are all obstinate and deaf to the voice of reason!" she cried angrily.

"It will rain tomorrow," said Mergy, looking up at the sky.

"Monsieur de Mergy, my friendship for your brother and your own approaching danger make me feel a great interest in you."

He bowed reverently.

"You heretics, you have no faith in relics?"

He smiled.

"And you would think yourselves soiled by touching them? she continued. "You, with the others, would refuse to wear them as we Roman Catholics are accustomed to?"

"To us 'others' that custom seems a little futile."

"Listen. One of my cousins once attached a relic to the throat of a hunting dog; then a dozen steps off he fired an arquebus loaded with buckshot at him."

"And the dog was killed?"

"Not a shot touched him."

"That is wonderful! I should really like to have a similar relic."

"Truly!—and would you wear it?"

"Certainly; as the relic protected the dog, so much the more——, but wait a minute—is it true that a heretic is worth as much as a dog, one belonging to a Catholic, of course?"

Madame de Turgis undid the buttons of her tight-

fitting bodice without paying attention to him and drew from her bosom a small, very flat gold box fastened to a black ribbon.

"There!" she said, "you have promised to wear it. Return it to me some day."

"If I can, certainly."

"But listen—you will take care of it?—no sacrilege! You must keep it with the greatest care!"

"It comes from you, madame!"

She gave him the relic and he took it and hung it about his neck. "A Catholic would thank the hand that gave him the holy talisman." Mergy seized her hand and tried to raise it to his lips.

"No, no; it is too late."

"But remember I may never have this opportunity again!"

"Then take off my glove," she said, holding out her hand.

On taking off the glove he seemed to feel a slight pressure. He imprinted a kiss like fire on the beautiful white hand.

"Monsieur Bernard," said the Countess with a voice of emotion, "will you be headstrong until the end, and is there no means of touching you? Will you finally be converted by my grace?"

"But, I do not know," he said, laughing; "pray for me very hard and very long. One thing is certain—no one else but you can convert me."

"Tell me—if a woman—who might know——" she hesitated.

"Who knew?"

"Yes. It is possible that—love, for example? But be frank! Speak to me seriously."

"Seriously?" And he tried to take her hand again.

"Yes. Could the love you may feel for a woman of another faith—could not such a love make you change? God uses all means."

"And do you wish me to reply to you frankly and seriously?"

"I insist upon it."

Mergy hung his head and hesitated in replying. In fact, he sought an evasive answer. Madame de Turgis had made advances to him which he did not wish to reject. On the other hand, as he had only been at Court a few hours his provincial conscience pricked him terribly.

"I hear the *hallali!*" cried the Countess suddenly without waiting for the response so difficult to make. She touched her whip to her horse and started off at a gallop for the field; Mergy followed her but without receiving a glance or a word.

In a moment they had rejoined the hunt.

The stag first plunged into a pond out of which he was dislodged with difficulty. Several hunters had dismounted and, arming themselves with long poles, forced the poor beast to continue his course. But the cold water completed the exhaustion of his strength. He left the pond panting and with his tongue hanging out, and he dashed off with irregular leaps. The hounds, on the other hand, seemed to redouble their strength. A little distance from the pond the stag, feeling that escape by flight was impossible, tried to make a last stand, backed against a large oak tree and bravely faced the hounds. The first to attack were gored and tossed into the air. A horse and rider were upset headlong. Men, horses and dogs all became prudent and formed a wide ring about the stag, but did not dare to get within reach of the threatening antlers.

The King sprang lightly to the ground with his hunting knife in his hand, slipped adroitly behind the oak tree and hacked at the stag with a back stroke. The stag uttered a kind of hissing groan and fell in an instant. At once twenty dogs dashed at him. Seized by the throat, muzzle and tongue, he was pinned down. Large tears streamed from his eyes.

"Let the ladies come forward!" cried the King.

The women approached; most of them had already dismounted.

"Take this, *parpaillot!*" said the King, plunging his knife into the side of the stag and turning the blade in the wound to make it larger. The blood spurted out violently and stained the face, hands and costume of the King. *Parpaillot* was a term of contempt which the Catholics frequently applied to the Calvinists. The word and the way it was used offended many, while others received it with applause.

"The King acts like a butcher," said young Teligny, who was the Admiral's son-in-law, rather loudly and with an expression of disgust.

Charitable souls—these are always especially numerous at Courts—reported the expression without fail to the monarch, who took good care not to forget it.

After enjoying the agreeable spectacle of the dogs devouring the entrails of the stag, the Court took the road to Paris. During the trip Mergy told his brother of the insult he received and the challenge which had followed. Councils and remonstrances were useless, and the captain promised to accompany him the next morning.

CHAPTER XI.

THE RAFFINÉ AND THE PRÉ-AUX-CLERCS.

"For one of us must yield his breath ere from this field one foot we flee."—*The Duel of Stuart and Wharton.*

Notwithstanding the fatigues of the chase, Mergy passed a good portion of the night without sleep. A burning fever kept him tossing restlessly in bed and gave a most harassing energy to his imagination. A thousand thoughts with only an incidental connection or no connection at all with the event for which he was preparing, beset and disturbed his brain; more than once he imagined the feverish disturbance he felt was but the prelude to a serious malady which would show itself in a few hours and confine him to his bed. Then what would become of his honor? What would the world say? What, above all, would Madame de Turgis and Comminges say? He would have given much to speed the moment appointed for the duel.

Fortunately, at sunrise he felt his blood course more calmly and he thought with less emotion of the encounter which had to take place. He dressed himself tranquilly and even gave some attention to his toilette. He pictured to himself the beautiful Countess hastening to the scene of action and finding him slightly wounded; she was dressing the wounds with her own hands and made no mystery of her love. The Louvre clock striking eight dispelled these thoughts, and almost at the same moment his brother entered the room.

A deep sadness clouded his expression and it was very evident that he, too, had passed no better night. But he forced a pleasant and cheerful smile as he grasped Mergy's hand.

"Here is a rapier for you," he said, "and a poniard with a shell hilt, both by Luno of Toledo; see if the weight suits you." And he threw a long rapier and a poniard on Mergy's bed.

Mergy drew the sword, bent it, looked at its point and seemed satisfied. The poniard next took his attention; the hilt was pierced with a great number of small holes designed to catch the point of the enemy's sword and to hold it so that it could not easily be disengaged.

"With such fine weapons as these," he said, "I think I can hold my own. Besides"—showing the relic given him by Madame de Turgis, which he kept in his bosom—"here is a talisman that protects one from sword thrusts better than any coat of mail," he added, smiling.

"Where did you get that bauble?"

"Give a guess." And his vanity in appearing a favorite of women made him forget for a moment both Comminges and the naked dueling sword before him.

"I wager it was that mad Countess. May the Devil take her and all her sex!"

"Do you know it is a talisman she gave me expressly for today?"

"It would have been better had she kept on her glove and never shown her pretty white hand!"

"God preserve me!" said Mergy, blushing highly, "from belief in these Papist relics, but if I fall today I want her to know I fell with her gauge on my breast."

"How fatuous!" cried the captain, shrugging his shoulders.

"Here is a letter for my mother," said Mergy in a trembling voice. George took it without a word and, walking to the table, opened a small Bible, while his brother finished his dressing and was tying the numberless strings with which clothes were then supported.

On the first page, which caught his eye, he read these words in his mother's handwriting:

"On the first of May, 1547, my son Bernard was born. Lord, keep him in Thy paths! Lord, preserve him from all evil!"

He bit his lips fiercely and threw the book violently on the table. Mergy, who saw the act, thought that some impious fancy passed through his mind; he took up the

Bible gravely, placed it in an embroidered case and locked it up in a cabinet with every mark of the greatest reverence.

"It is my mother's Bible," he said.

The captain paced the room without replying.

"Is it not time to go?" said Mergy, buckling on his sword belt.

"Not yet, and we have time for breakfast."

Both sat down at a table covered with cakes of various kinds and also a great silver tankard filled with wine. While eating they discussed at length and with apparent interest the merits of the wine as compared to other wines in the captain's cellar, each attempting to hide under the cover of this futile conversation his real thoughts from his companion.

The captain rose first.

"Let us go," he said in a hoarse voice. He crushed his hat over his eyes and left quickly.

They took a boat and crossed the Seine. The boatman, who guessed by their appearance the motives taking them to the Pré-aux-Clercs, exerted himself greatly, and as he rowed vigorously across he told them in great detail how, within the past month, two gentlemen, one called Count de Comminges, had done him the honor of hiring his boat so as to fight at ease and without fear of interruption. The adversary of Monsieur de Comminges, whose name he regretted not having heard, was run through and upset into the river, from which he, the boatman, was never able to recover him.

The moment they landed they saw a boat with two passengers crossing the river a hundred feet lower down.

"There are our men," said the captain; "you stay here." And he ran to meet the boat carrying Comminges and Viscount de Béville.

"Oh! There you are!" cried the latter; "is it you or your brother that Comminges is going to slay?" As he said this he laughed and embraced him.

The captain and Comminges saluted each other gravely.

"Now, monsieur," said the captain to Comminges as soon as he could leave Béville's embrace, "I think it my duty to make a last attempt to stop the fatal results of a quarrel founded upon no point of honor whatever; I am certain that my friend," he pointed to Béville, "will join forces with me."

Béville smiled negatively.

"My brother is very young," continued George, "and having neither name nor practice in fighting has, therefore, to show himself more punctilious than another. As for you—your reputation is made, monsieur, and your honor can only gain by it if you will be gracious enough to admit before Monsieur de Béville and me that it was by accident——"

Comminges interrupted him with a loud burst of laughter.

"My dear Captain, are you jesting and do you suppose I am the man to leave my mistress at this hour—to cross the Seine just to make excuses before a schoolboy?"

"Monsieur, you forget that the person you mention is my brother; it is insulting——"

"Even if he were your father, of what importance is that to me? I care little for the entire family."

"Very well, monsieur; by your good leave you shall have to settle with the entire family. And as I am the eldest please start with me."

"Pardon me, Monsieur Captain; I am obliged by all the rules of dueling to fight with the one who first challenged me. Your brother's prior right is imprescribable, as they say in the Palais de Justice; when I have settled with him I am at your command."

"That is perfectly fair," cried Béville, "and for my part I will not consent to anything else."

Surprised at the length of the conversation, Mergy approached slowly. He came just in time to hear his brother heap insults upon Comminges, even to the point of calling him a coward, while Comminges answered with imperturable calm:

"I shall attend to you after your brother."

Mergy grasped his brother's arm.

"George," he cried, "is this the manner you do me a service? And would you want me to take a part for you in the way you take one for me? Monsieur," he said, turning to Comminges, "I am at your command; we shall commence when you wish."

"Then let it be this instant," said the latter.

"That is excellent, my dear friend," said Béville, and grasped Mergy's hand. "You will do well if we do not have to bury you here, my boy."

Comminges took off his doublet and untied the strings of his shoes, thus showing that he did not mean to retreat a step. This was the fashion with professional duelists. Mergy and de Béville did likewise; only the captain did not take off so much as his mantle.

"George, my friend, what are you about?" said Béville. "Do you not know that you must cross swords with me? We are not the kind of seconds who fold their arms while their friends fight, and we will follow the custom of Andalusia."

The captain shrugged his shoulders.

"Then you think I am jesting? By my faith, I swear to you that you must fight me. The Devil take me if you shall not!"

"You are a fool and a sot," said the captain coolly.

"*Parbleau!* You shall give me a reason for saying those two words, or you will drive me to——" He lifted his still sheathed sword as if he wanted to strike George.

"If you demand it," said the captain, "then so be it." And in an instant he stripped off his doublet.

Comminges flourished his sword in the air with a deliberate grace and at one stroke sent the scabbard flying twenty paces. Béville tried to do likewise, but the scabbard stuck in the middle of the blade, which was then considered both awkward and a presage of evil. The two brothers drew their swords with less flourish, but they, too, flung down their scabbards, which might have been

in the way. Each man faced his adversary—a naked sword in the right hand, a dagger in the left. The four blades crossed at the same time.

First, George, by a maneuver which the Italian masters then called *liscio di spada è cavere alla vita,** and which consists in opposing the weak part of the sword with the strong, so as to deflect and beat down his adversary's blade, made Béville's sword fly from his hand and set his own point at his antagonist's breast; but instead of running him through he coolly lowered his weapon.

"You are not my match," he said. "Let us stop now; do not wait until I am angry."

Béville blanched on seeing George's sword so close to his breast. Rather confounded, he held out his hand to him; and both planted their swords in the ground, thinking only of watching the two principal actors in that scene.

Mergy was brave and cool. He knew how to fence well enough, and his bodily strength was much greater than that of Comminges, who appeared not to have recovered from his fatigue of the night before. For some time he confined himself to parrying with extreme care, breaking ground when Comminges pressed hard and always keeping the point of his rapier at his adversary's face, while he covered his breast with his dagger. The unexpected resistance irritated Comminges. One could see him grow paler. This, in so brave a man, indicates excessive rage. He redoubled his attacks with fury. In making a pass he beat up Mergy's sword with great skill and, slashing impetuously, would certainly have pierced him through and through save for a circumstance almost like a miracle which spoilt the stroke; the point of the rapier struck the polished gold relic which made it slip in a slightly oblique direction. Instead of penetrating Mergy's breast the sword only scratched him slightly and, going parallel to the fifth rib, struck two inches distance from

*To strike the blade and disengage the body. All fencing terms were then borrowed from the Italian.

the first incision. Before Comminges could draw back his sword Mergy struck him on the head with his dagger so violently that he lost his balance and fell to the ground. Comminges dropped at the same time, so that the seconds thought them both dead.

Mergy was soon on his feet, and his first motion was to pick up his sword which he had let drop in his fall. Comminges did not stir. Béville lifted him up. His face was covered with blood, and wiping it with a handkerchief he saw that the dagger had entered the eye and that his friend had been killed on the spot, the steel having certainly penetrated the brain.

Mergy looked at the corpse with haggard eyes.

"You are wounded, Bernard," said the captain, running toward him.

"Wounded?" asked Mergy, and then for the first time he saw that his doublet was bloody.

"It is nothing," said the captain; "the blow glanced off." He staunched the blood with his handkerchief and asked Béville for his to bind up the wound. Béville let the body of Comminges fall and promptly gave him not only his handkerchief but that belonging to Comminges, which he took out of his doublet.

"Tudieu! My friend, what a stab! You have a strong arm! *Mort de ma vie!* What will the raffinés of Paris say if a man from the country can do this? Tell me, upon your word, how many duels have you fought?"

"Alas!" replied Mergy, "this is the first. But in God's name look to your friend."

"Parbleu! After what you have done for him he needs no help; the dagger entered his brain, and the blow was so well directed and so powerfully dealt that—— Just look at his brow and cheek; the hilt of the poinard has left its impression there like a seal on wax."

Mergy began to tremble all over and large tears started to course down his cheeks.

Béville took up the dagger and looked with interest at the blood which began to clot upon it.

"Here is a piece of iron to which the younger brother of Comminges should give a handsome offering. This beautiful dagger has made him heir to a superb fortune."

"Let us leave this place; take me away," said Mergy, in a stifled voice, and took his brother by the arm.

"Do not grieve," said George, and helped him into his doublet. "After all, it is not dignified to regret a man who is dead."

"Poor Comminges!" cried Béville; "killed by a young man fighting his first duel—you who have fought more than a hundred times! Poor Comminges!"

Thus ended his funeral oration.

And looking at his friend for the last time, Béville noticed the dead man's watch hanging about his neck, as was then the fashion.

"*Parbleu!*" he cried, "you will no longer want to know what hour it is." He took off the watch and put it in his pocket, remarking that Comminges' brother was quite rich as it was and that he himself wished to preserve a memorial of his friend.

As the two brothers were leaving him:

"Wait for me!" he cried, putting on his doublet in haste. "Here! Monsieur de Mergy, you forgot your dagger! You cannot easily find such another." He wiped the blade upon the doublet of the dead man and then joined the young duelist.

"Be of good cheer, *mon cher,*" he said, getting into the boat. "Do not look so sad. Listen, instead of lamenting go to see your mistress this day—see if you cannot replace a citizen of the State. Come, boatman, row as if you wished to earn a pistole. See the men with halberds advancing against us. It is a part of the guard from the Tower of Nesle and we do not want to have dealings with them."

CHAPTER XII.

WHITE MAGIC.

Cette nuit j'ai songé de poisson mort et d'oeufs cassés, et j'ai appris du seigneur Anaxarque que les oeufs cassés et le poisson mort signifient malencontre.—MOLIÈRE, *Les Amants magnifiques.*

The men armed with halberds were a troop of the soldiers of the guard, who were always stationed in the neighborhood of the Pré-aux-Clercs ready to interpose in the quarrels usually settled on this classic dueling ground. According to their custom, they advanced very slowly and did not arrive until all was over. To tell the truth, their attempts at peace-making were often received with great ill-nature, and more than once the most desperate enemies suspended a mortal combat to attack, side by side, the soldiers who tried to separate them. So the functions of the guard were generally confined to helping the wounded or carrying off the dead. On this occasion the archers had but the latter office to perform, and they did it in their usual way; that is to say they first carefully rifled the pockets of poor Comminges and then divided his garments.

"My dear friend," said Béville, turning to Mergy, "my counsel to you is to have yourself taken with the utmost possible secrecy to Master Ambrose Paré, who is an admirable man for sewing up a wound or mending a broken limb for you. He is as good a heretic as Calvin himself, yet he has such a reputation for science that even the most ardent Catholics have recourse to him. Up to the present time no one but the Marquise de Boissières has faced death bravely rather than owe her life to a Huguenot. Also, I wager ten pistoles that she is now in Paradise."

"The wound is nothing," said George; "in three days it will heal. But Comminges has relations in Paris and I fear they might take his death rather too much to heart."

"Ah! Yes! There is also a mother who will, for propriety, feel herself obliged to prosecute our friend. Bah! Ask Monsieur de Châtillon to obtain his pardon; the King will immediately grant it, for the King is like wax in the Admiral's fingers."

"I should wish, if it were possible," said Mergy, in a feeble voice, "I should wish that the Admiral knew nothing about what happened."

"Why, then? Do you think that the old graybeard will be chagrined on learning how boldly a Protestant dispatches a Catholic?"

Mergy replied only with a deep sigh.

"Comminges was too well known at Court for his death not to make an alarm," said the captain. "But you have done your duty like a gentleman and you gain nothing but honor from the entire affair. For a long time I have not visited old Châtillon and this will be an occasion to renew my acquainance with him."

"As it is always unpleasant to spend hours behind the bars of justice," replied Béville, "I shall take your brother to a house where they will not think of looking for him. He will rest in perfect tranquillity until this affair is settled, for I do not believe they can receive him in a sanctuary on account of his heretic leanings."

"I thank you for your offer, monsieur," said Mergy, "but I cannot accept it. I might compromise you by doing so."

"No, not a bit of it, my dear fellow; and should a man not stand by his friends? The house where I live belongs to one of my cousins, who is not in Paris just now. It is at my disposal. There is some one there to whom I have given lodging who will look after you: it is an old lady who is very useful to us young men and is devoted to me. She knows medicine, magic and astronomy. What cannot she do? But her very best talent is that of go-between. Blast me if she would not take a love note to the Queen herself if I asked her."

"Good!" said the captain; "we shall take him to that house immediately after Master Ambrose gives him his first dressing."

While they were speaking the boat touched the right bank. After mounting Mergy on a horse, not without some difficulty, they took him to the famous surgeon and then from there to an isolated mansion in the Faubourg Saint Antoine, and they did not leave him until the evening, resting in a fine bed and particularly recommended to the old woman's care.

When you have killed a man, and that man is the first you have killed, you are haunted for a long time, and especially at the approach of night, by the remembrance of the expression during the last convulsion preceding his death. Your mind is so occupied with black thoughts that you are only able to take part in the most trifling conversation with great difficulty; it fatigues and bores; then, on the other hand, you have a fear of solitude because it strengthens oppressive ideas. In spite of the frequent visits of Béville and the captain, Mergy passed the first days following his duel in deepest sadness. A raging fever, caused by his wound, deprived him of sleep during the nights, so it was then that he had his worst period. Only the idea that Madame de Turgis thought of him and admired his courage consoled him a little, but did not calm him.

One night, oppressed by the stifling heat, for it was in the month of July, he wished to leave his room and walk outdoors to breathe the air in a garden planted with trees, in the middle of which the mansion stood. He drew a mantle over his shoulders and was about to leave, but found that his door was locked by the key on the outside. He thought it might be only an oversight made by the old woman who nursed him; as she slept at a distance, so at that hour would be sound asleep, he thought it entirely futile to call her. Besides, his window was not at all high up; below the ground was soft, having been recently dug. In an instant he dropped into the garden. The hour was

secret: not a star "touched the end of his nose" and rare puffs of wind crossed, from time to time and as if with difficulty, the hot and heavy atmosphere. It was about two o'clock in the morning and the profoundest silence reigned in the neighborhood.

Mergy promenaded for a while absorbed in his reveries. These were interrupted by a knock given at the street gate. It was at a stroke of the knocker that was faint and mysterious, as if the one who rapped seemed certain that some one would be ready to open it. A visit to an isolated mansion at such an hour was something amazing. Mergy kept himself motionless in a dark corner of the garden, from which he wished to observe without being seen. A woman who could be none other than the old nurse came out of the house instantly, carrying a lantern in her hand; she opened the gate and some one entered who was enveloped in a black Capuchin monk's robe.

Bernard's curiosity was highly excited. The figure and, as far as he could judge, the garments of the person who had entered were those of a woman. The old nurse greeted her with all the marks of great respect, while the woman in the black mantle scarcely nodded her head to her. On the other hand, she put something in the old woman's fingers which she seemed to receive with great pleasure. A clear and metallic sound and the eagerness of the old woman in stooping to look on the ground, forced Mergy to the conclusion that what she received was money. The two women crossed over to the garden, the old woman going first and hiding her lantern. At the end of the garden there was a kind of arbor of leaves formed by lime trees planted in a circle and joined by a very thick hedge which easily took the place of a wall. Two entrances or gates led to the arbor, in the center of which was a small stone table. Into this the old woman and the veiled stranger entered. Mergy, holding his breath, followed with the tread of a wolf and stationed himself behind the hedge in such a manner that he could

hear perfectly and see as well as the faint light illuminating the scene permitted him.

The first thing the old woman did was to light something in a tripod placed in the middle of the table, which flared up instantly, throwing out a pale bluish light like spirits of wine mixed with salt. She then extinguished or hooded her lantern so that by the flickering light which came from the tripod Mergy would have had difficulty in recognizing the stranger's features even if they had not been hidden by veil and hood. As for the old woman, it was not difficult to recognize her by her form and stature; only he noticed that her face was smeared with a dark color which made her, under her white coif, look like a bronze figure. The table was covered with strange objects which he could hardly see. They seemed arranged in some bizarre order; and he thought he distinguished amongst them fruit, pieces of bone and some fragments of blood-stained linen. A little figure of a man, apparently of wax and about a foot high, stood above these soiled rags.

"Well, Camilla," said the veiled woman in a low voice. "You say he is better?"

The voice made Mergy start.

"A little better, madame," replied the old woman, "thanks to our noble art. Still with these scraps and the little blood there is on the bandages it has been difficult for me to do very much."

"And what does Master Ambrose Paré say?"

"He, that ignoramus! What does it matter what he says? I assure you that the wound is deep, dangerous and terrible, and that it can only be cured by the rules of magic sympathy; but it is necessary to sacrifice frequently to the spirits of the earth and air—and for sacrifice——"

The woman understood at once.

"If he is cured you shall have double what I have just given you."

"Have good hope and rely on me."

"Ah! Camilla, if he should die!"

"Rest easy, the spirits are propitious, the stars protect us, and the last sacrifice of the black ram has favorably disposed of The Other."

"I brought you something which gave me much trouble to procure. I bought it from one of the archers who stripped the body." She drew something from beneath her cloak and Mergy caught the glitter of a sword blade. The old woman took it and held it close to the light for examination.

"Thank Heaven! The blade is bloody and rusted! Yes! His blood is like that of the Basilisk of Cathay—it leaves on the steel a stain impossible to efface."

She examined the blade carefully, and it was evident that the veiled woman felt more than ordinary emotion.

"See, Camilla, how near the blood is to the hilt. The blow is perhaps mortal."

"That blood is not the heart's blood. He will recover."

"He will recover?"

"Yes, but by catching an incurable disease."

"What disease?"

"Love."

"Ah! Camilla, do you speak the truth?"

"Eh! When have I failed to tell the truth? When have my predictions failed to materialize? Did I not predict that he would come out victorious in the duel? Did I not announce that the spirits would fight for him? Did I not bury a black hen and a sword blessed by the priest on the same spot where the duel was to take place?"

"That is true."

"Did not you yourself pierce to the heart the image of his adversary, thus directing the blows of the man for whom I have employed my science?"

"Yes, Camilla, I pierced the heart of the image of Comminges, but they say it was a blow in the head that killed him."

"No doubt, the steel struck his head; but did he not die because his heart's blood congealed?"

The veiled woman seemed crushed by the force of the argument. She was silent. The old woman moistened the hilt and the blade of the sword and wrapped it in bandages with great care.

"See, madame, this scorpion's oil with which I rub the sword is carried by virtue of sympathy into the cut of the young man. He feels the effects of this African balsam just as if I poured it into his wound; and if I wished to let the point of the sword get red-hot in the fire, the poor invalid would suffer as much torture as if he were burned alive."

"Oh! Be on your guard against such an act!"

"On a certain evening I sat by a fireplace very busy rubbing a sword with balsam to cure a young gentleman in whose head it had made two frightful wounds. I fell asleep at my task. All at once the invalid's lackey came and knocked at the door; he told me that his master suffered mortally and passionately, and at the time he left him he felt as if he were stretched out on blazing coals. Do you know what happened? Through carelessness the sword slipped and the blade was at that moment in the embers. I took it out quickly and said to the lackey that he would upon his return find his master recovered and in perfect ease. In short, I at once plunged the sword into ice-cold water with a mixture of certain drugs and went to see my patient. As I entered he cried to me: 'Ah! My good Camilla, how well I am at this moment! I feel as if I were in a bath of cold water, whereas for the past hour I was like Saint Lawrence on the grid-iron.'"

She finished dressing the wound and said with an air of satisfaction: "That is good. Now I am certain of his recovery, and now you may give attention to the last ceremony." She threw several pinches of a perfumed powder into the flame, muttering some barbarous words as she continually made the sign of the cross. Then the stranger took out the waxen image with a trembling hand and, holding it above the tripod, she pronounced these words with a voice of emotion:

"As this wax melts and burns in the flame of the tripod so, Bernard Mergy, may your heart melt and burn with love for me!"

"Good. Now here is a green candle moulded at midnight, according to the rules of the art. Tomorrow light it and place it before the altar of the Virgin."

"I shall do so; but in spite of all your promises I am terribly anxious. Yesterday I dreamed he was dead."

"Were you sleeping on your right side or your left?"

"On—on which side do you have true dreams?"

"Tell me first on which side you slept. I see that you wish to abuse and delude yourself."

"I always sleep on my right side."

"Reassure yourself, your dream announces nothing but good fortune."

"God grant it! But I saw him pale, bleeding and wrapped in a shroud——"

As she spoke she turned her head and saw Mergy standing at one of the arbor entrances. Her amazement made her cry out so piercingly that Mergy himself was astonished. The old woman, either on purpose or by accident, upset the tripod and there instantly arose to the tops of the lime trees a brilliant flash of light that blinded him for several moments. The two women immediately escaped through the opposite entrance of the arbor. As soon as Mergy could distinguish the opening in the hedge he tried to pursue them, but at his first movement he nearly fell because something got between his legs. He recognized it as the sword to which he owed his cure. He lost still more time in getting rid of it and finding his way, and the moment he reached a wide cleared path, and thought there was nothing else to prevent his overtaking the fugitives, he heard the street gate slam. They were out of reach.

A little mortified at having let such fair prey escape, he regained his chamber on tiptoe and threw himself on the bed. All doleful thoughts were banished from his mind, and remorse, if he had any, or the anxiety which

his present position might cause him, disappeared as if by magic. He thought of nothing but the happiness of being loved by the most beautiful woman in Paris, for he had no doubt that Madame de Turgis was the veiled woman. He fell asleep a little after sunrise and woke only after it had been broad daylight for several hours. Upon his pillow he found a sealed note placed there, he did not know how, and opening it he read these words:

"Cavalier, a woman's honor depends upon your discretion."

An instant or two later the old woman came in to bring him some bouillon. For the day she wore, contrary to her custom, a chaplet of large beads hung to her girdle. Her skin, carefully washed, was no longer like bronze, but like smoked parchment. She walked with slow steps and downcast eyes like a person who is afraid of being troubled by the sight of earthly things in her contemplation of the divine.

Mergy thought that, for the more meritorious practice which the mysterious note recommended to him, he had better first thoroughly instruct himself as to what he was to keep secret from everyone. While he still held the bouillon in his hand and without giving old Martha time to reach the door:

"Why have you never told me your name was Camilla?"

"Camilla? My name is Martha, good monsieur—Martha Micheli," said the old woman, affecting great surprise at his question.

"Very well! So be it. You are to be called Martha by men; but spirits know you under the name of Camilla."

"Spirits!—Gracious Savior! What do you mean?" She made a great sign of the cross.

"Come, do not pretend with me; I will tell no one, and all this is between ourselves. Who is the woman who takes such interest in my health?"

"The woman who——?"

"Do not repeat all I have said, and speak frankly. On my word as a gentleman! I shall not betray you."

"Truly, my good gentleman, I do not know what you are talking about."

Mergy could not help laughing as he saw her sham astonishment and placed his hand over her heart. He took a piece of gold from the purse that hung at the head of his bed and offered it to the old woman.

"Come, good Camilla, you take such great care of me and give yourself so much trouble in rubbing swords with scorpion's balm, all for the sake of curing me, that, in fact, I should have made you a present long before now."

"Alas! My young gentleman, truly, truly, I do not understand a word you say."

"*Morbleu!* Martha or Camilla, if you like, do not make me angry, but answer. Who is the woman for whom you performed all that wonderful witchcraft last night?"

. "Oh, Gracious Savior! He is getting angry! Can it be that he is delirious?"

Mergy was impatient; he seized his pillow and flung it at her head. The old woman replaced it on the bed with humility, picked up the gold crown which had fallen on the floor, and as the captain entered at that moment she was relieved of her fear of an examination which might have ended awkwardly for her.

CHAPTER XIII

CALUMNY.

King Henry IV: Thou doest belie him, Percy; thou doest belie him.—SHAKESPEARE, *King Henry IV.*

George went to see the Admiral the same morning to talk about his brother. In two words he told the whole story.

The Admiral, as he listened, crunched his teeth against the toothpick in his mouth; it was his usual sign of impatience.

"I know the affair already," he said, "and I am surprised that you speak of it, because it is already notorious."

"If I trouble you, Lord Admiral, it is only because I know the interest you deign to take in our family, and I venture to hope that you will solicit the King in favor of my brother. Your credit with His Majesty——"

"My credit, if I have any," the Admiral interrupted vehemently, "my credit depends on the fact that I never address any but just requests to His Majesty." And as he spoke the last word he uncovered with respect.

"The circumstance obliging my brother to have recourse to your goodness is, unfortunately, only too common in these days. The King signed more than fifteen hundred writs of pardon last year, and Bernard's adversary himself has often profited by this immunity."

"Your brother was the aggressor. Perhaps, and I wish it were true, he has only followed detestable advice."

He looked fixedly at the captain as he spoke.

"I made every effort to prevent the fatal result of this quarrel; but you know Monsieur de Comminges was of a temper to accord no other satisfaction than that at the point of the sword. The honor of a gentleman and the opinion of the women——"

"Then this is the way you talk to the young man? You hope to make a *raffiné* of him no doubt. Oh! How his father would grieve if he learned what contempt his son has for his counsel! Good God! It is only two years since our Civil Wars were settled and they have already forgotten the rivers of blood started in them. They are still unsatisfied; every day Frenchmen cut the throats of other Frenchmen!"

"If I had known, monsieur, that my petition would have been disagreeable to you——"

"Listen, Monsieur de Mergy, I might perhaps do violence to my sentiments as a Christian and excuse your brother's provocation, but according to the public report his conduct in the duel following was not——"

"What are you saying, Monsieur Admiral?"

"That the fight was not carried on in the loyal manner and fashion of French gentlemen."

"And who has dared to spread such an infamous calumny?" cried George his eyes flashing fury.

"Calm yourself. You can send no challenge on this point, for as yet we do not fight with women. Comminges' mother has given the King details about your brother which do not come up to the point of honor. They may perhaps explain how so redoubtable a champion easily succumbed to the blows of a boy almost only a page."

"A mother's grief is great and sacred! Is it astonishing that she cannot see the truth through eyes still bathed

in tears? I hope, Monsieur Admiral, that you will not judge my brother from the story of Madame de Comminges."

Coligny seemed moved and his voice lost a little of its bitter irony.

"You cannot deny, however, that Béville, Comminges' second, was your intimate friend."

"I have known him for a long time and am under obligations to him. But Comminges was as intimate with him as I. Comminges himself chose him as his second. Finally, Béville's bravery and honor put him above the suspicion of disloyalty."

The Admiral contracted his mouth with an air of profound disdain.

"The honor of Béville!" he repeated, and shrugged his shoulders. "An atheist! A man lost in debauchery!"

"Yes! Béville is a man of honor," cried the captain forcefully. "But why this conversation? Was I not also present at the duel? Is it for you, Monsieur Admiral, to question the honor of our house and accuse us of assassination?"

There was something a little menacing in his tone of voice. Coligny either did not understand or despised the allusion to the murder of Duke Francis of Guise which Catholic hatred attributed to him. His features relaxed into an imperturbable calm.

"Monsieur de Mergy," he said in a cold and contemptuous tone, "a man who has renounced his religion has no right to speak of his honor, for people will not believe in it."

The captain's face flushed purple and an instant later turned ghastly pale. He recoiled two steps backward as if not to succumb to the temptation of striking an old man.

"Monsieur!" he cried, "your age and your rank permit you to insult with impunity the most precious possession of a poor gentleman. But I beg you to bid one

of your followers, or more than one, to indorse the words you have just spoken. I swear by God, that they shall swallow those words until they choke."

"That is, no doubt, the practice with the messieurs called *raffinés.* I do not know their customs and I dismiss those of my gentlemen who imitate them."

He turned his back on him as he spoke. The captain, with rage in his soul, left the Hôtel de Châtillon, sprang on his horse and, as if to relieve his anger, made the poor beast gallop at full speed by digging his spurs into his flanks. In his impetuous course he just missed riding down a number of peaceful passersby, and it was fortunate that he did not meet a single *raffiné* on his ride, because, in the temper which possessed him, he would certainly have seized the slightest occasion to draw his sword.

When he rode as far as Vincennes his heated blood began to cool. He turned the bridle and brought his horse, bloody and moist with sweat, back toward Paris. "Poor friend," he said with a bitter smile, "I am punishing you for his insults to me!" And patting the neck of the innocent victim he rode slowly back to his brother's house. He merely told him the Admiral had refused to intercede for him, omitting the details of their conversation.

But a few minutes later Béville entered and immediately threw himself on Mergy's neck and said to him: "I congratulate you, my dear fellow; here is your pardon, obtained for you by the intercession of the Queen."

Mergy felt less suprise than his brother. In his soul he attributed this favor to the veiled woman—that is to say, to the Countess de Turgis.

CHAPTER XIV

THE RENDEZVOUS.

Madame va venir dans cette salle basse
Et d'un mot d'entretien vous demande la grâce.
MOLIÈRE, *Tartuffe.*

Mergy again shared the apartments of his brother; he went to pay a visit of thanks to the Queen Mother and reappeared at Court. On entering the Louvre he noticed that he in some way had fallen heir to the consideration paid to Comminges. Those people whom he knew by sight saluted him with an air of obeisance and familiarity. Men as they spoke of him hid their envy badly under a surface of polite disguise; women looked at him and coquetted at a distance because the reputation as duelist in those days was a certain means of touching their hearts. To have killed three or four men in single combat supplied the lack of good looks, riches and spirits. In short, when our hero paraded in the gallery of the Louvre he noticed a murmer of remarks about himself: "There is young Mergy, who killed Comminges!" "How young he is!" "What a graceful figure!" "Such a manner! What a proudly curled mustache! Do you know who his mistress is?"

But Mergy sought in vain among the crowd for the blue eyes and black eyebrows of Madame de Turgis. He visited her home, but there he learned that shortly after Comminges' death she had left for one of her estates situated twenty leagues from Paris. If evil tongues could be believed, her sorrow at the death of her lover forced her to find a retreat where she could bear her grief in quiet.

One morning as the captain was stretched out on a day bed and was reading *The Very Horrific Life of Pantagruel,* while awaiting his breakfast, and as his brother was taking a lesson on the guitar under the in-

struction of Signor Uberto Vinibella, a lackey came to announce to Bernard that a very well-dressed old woman waited for him in the lower hall and asked for an interview with an air of mystery. He descended at once and received from the sunburned hands of an old woman, who was neither a Martha nor a Camilla, a letter which exhaled a fragrant perfume; it was sealed with a gold thread and a large wafer of green wax upon which, instead of arms, nothing could be seen but a cupid with a finger to his lips, with the Castillian motto: *Callad* (silence). He opened it and found only a single line in Spanish, which he made out with difficulty: *"Esta noche, una dama espera a V. M."* ("A lady expects you this evening.")

"Who gave you this letter?" he asked the woman.

"A woman."

"Her name?"

"I do not know. She is Spanish, from what she says."

"How does she know me?"

The woman shrugged her shoulders.

"Your reputation and your gallantry has brought this ugly affair on you," she said sarcastically. "But answer me—will you come?"

"Where am I to go?"

"This evening at half-past eight be at the church of Saint Germain-l'Auxerrois to the left side of the nave."

"And is it in the church that I am to see this lady?"

"No; some one there will meet you and guide you to her. But you must be discreet and come alone."

"Yes."

"You promise?"

"I give you my word."

"Adieu, then. Above all, do not follow me."

She made a profound courtesy and left immediately.

"Well, what did my Lady-Go-Between want with you?" asked the captain as soon as his brother had returned and the guitar teacher had left.

"Oh, nothing," replied Mergy, with an air of indifference, and stared attentively at the Madonna mentioned before.

"Come, keep no secrets from me. Must I accompany you to your rendezvous, guard the street and keep back the jealous sharp blows with the flat of my sword?"

"Not at all, I tell you."

"Oh, just as you wish. Guard your secret if you will, but I wager you that you are as anxious to tell me as I am to learn."

Mergy strummed the strings of his guitar in an absent manner.

"By the way, George, I am not able to take supper with Monsieur de Vaudreul."

"Ah! It takes place tonight? Is she pretty? Is she a lady at Court? Or bourgeoisie? Or of the merchant class?"

"Truly, I do not know. I am to be introduced to a lady—who is not from this country—but from which one—I—am ignorant."

"But at least you know where the meeting place is?"

Bernard showed the note and repeated what the old woman said to him.

"It is written in a disguised hand," said the captain, "and I do not know what to think of these precautions."

"She must be some great lady, George."

"How like you young men, that is—to imagine at the least excuse that women are going to throw themselves at your heads!"

"But smell the perfume the letter exhales."

"What does that prove?"

The brow of the captain suddenly darkened as a sinister thought crossed his mind.

"The Comminges are revengeful," he said, "and this letter, perhaps, is only an invention of theirs to lure you into some out-of-the--way corner where they will make you pay dear for the poinard thrust which gave them their inheritance."

"What an idea!"

"It would not be the first time that love has served vengeance. You have read your Bible, remember—Samson was betrayed by Delilah."

"I would consider myself a great coward if such an improbable conjecture made me hesitate at accepting a rendezvous that may be so delightful? A Spanish woman——"

"At any rate, go well armed. If you wish, I will supply you with my two lackeys."

"For shame! Call the entire city to witness my good fortune?"

"That is quite usual today. I have often seen my good friend D'Ardelay going to see his mistress with a coat of mail on his back and a pair of pistols in his belt!—and four soldiers of his company, each man with a loaded petronel, marching behind him. You do not know Paris yet, my comrade, and take my word—an excess of precaution does no harm. One has nothing to do but strip the coat of mail when it is in the way."

"I am without the least anxiety. If the relatives of Comminges intend to injure me, they could easily have attacked me in the street last night."

"Then I shall let you go only on condition that you take your pistols."

"*A la bonne heure!* But I shall be laughed at."

"Nor is this all; you must have a good dinner; eat two partridges and plenty of cockscomb patties that you may do credit to the family of Mergy tonight."

Bernard withdrew to his room, where he spent at least four hours in combing and curling his hair, in perfuming himself, and finally in studying the eloquent discourse he intended for the beautiful unknown.

I leave it to my readers to guess if he was punctual at the rendezvous or not. He promenaded a full half hour before the church. He had already counted the candles, the columns and the votive offerings three times, when an old woman, carefully enveloped in a brown cloak,

came in, took his hand and, without speaking a single word, led him into the street. Still observing the same silence, she led him after several detours into a narrow and apparently uninhabited by-street. At the end of it she stopped before a very low, small, arched door, which she opened with a key she took out of her pocket. She entered first and Mergy followed, holding her by the cape on account of the darkness. No sooner had he entered than he heard enormous bolts drawn back of him. His guide warned him in a low voice that he was at the foot of a staircase and there were twenty-seven steps to climb. The staircase was very narrow and the worn and irregular steps more than once nearly brought him down. Finally, after the twenty-seventh step, which terminated at a small landing, was passed, the old woman opened a door and a brilliant light dazzled Mergy's eyes for a moment. Then he entered an apartment much more lavishly furnished than the outer appearance of the house promised.

The walls were hung with flowered tapestry somewhat faded, it is true, but still very fine. In the middle of the room he saw a table illuminated by two flambeaux of rose-colored wax and covered with various kinds of fruits and cakes, and also glasses and flasks of crystal, the latter apparently filled with wines of different kinds. Two large arm-chairs placed at the two ends of the table evidently awaited guests. In an alcove, half hidden by silk hangings, was a very ornate bed covered with crimson satin. Several incense burners shed a voluptuous perfume through the apartment.

The old woman took off her mantle and Mergy his cloak. He at once recognized the messenger who had brought the letter.

"Saint Mary!" cried the old woman, when she saw Mergy's sword and pistols, "do you think you have to hew down giants? There are no sword blows to be dealt here, my fine cavalier."

"I should like to think so, but it is possible that some

brothers or an ill-natured husband may disturb the meeting and in that case here is something that will throw powder into their eyes."

"You need fear nothing of the sort here. But tell me, how do you like the room?"

"It is certainly very fine but I should grow weary of it if I had to stay here alone."

"You shall have one who will keep you company presently. But in the meanwhile you must promise me one thing."

"And that is?"

"If you are a Catholic, you must lay your hand on this crucifix," and she took one from the cupboard; "if you are a Huguenot, you must swear by Calvin—by Luther, by all your Gods—in short——"

"And what must I swear?" he interrupted, smiling.

"You must give me your word not to make any effort to find out who the lady is who will come here."

"That is a hard condition."

"Listen. You must give me your oath or I shall take you back to the street."

"Well, then, you have my word for it and that is as good as the foolish oaths you propose."

"That is good. Now wait patiently; eat and drink if you care to, and you shall see the Spanish lady enter without delay."

She took her mantle and went out, double-locking the door.

Mergy threw himself into a chair. His heart beat violenty; he felt an emotion as strong as that he had experienced a few days before, and almost of the same nature, at the moment of meeting his enemy in the Pré-aux-Clercs.

A deep silence reigned through the house and a full half hour passed, during which his fancy painted by turns Venus stepping from the tapestry to throw herself into his arms; the Countess de Turgis in her hunting habit; a princess of the royal blood; a gang of assassins and

finally an idea more horrible than these—an amorous old woman.

Suddenly, without the least sound to announce that some one had entered the house, the key turned quickly in the lock, the door opened and shut as if of its own accord, and in a moment a masked woman entered the room.

Her figure was tall and well formed. A robe fitting closely to her corsage showed the grace of her figure; but neither the tiny foot, slippered in white velvet, nor the little hand, unluckily covered with an embroidered glove, could give any clear indication of the incognita's age. I do not know what—magnetic influence perhaps, or presentiment, if you wish—made him think that she was not more than twenty-five. Her costume was rich, splendid and simple at the same time.

Mergy rose at once and kneeled before her. The woman advanced a step toward him and then said in a sweet voice:

"Dios es guarde, caballero, Sea V. M. el bien venido" (God guard you, monsieur. Welcome").

Mergy gave a start of surprise.

"Habla V. M. espanol?"

But he spoke no Spanish and hardly understood any.

The woman seemed vexed. She allowed Mergy to lead her to one of the chairs in which he sat, motioning him to take the other. Then she began the conversation in French, but with a foreign accent sometimes very marked and rather exaggerated, while at other times for moments it did not appear at all.

"Monsieur, your bravery has made me forget the reserve natural to my sex; I wished to see so accomplished a cavalier and I find all that report has asserted."

Mergy reddened and bowed.

"Will you, madame, be so cruel as to keep on that mask which, like an envious cloud, hides the rays of the sun from me?" He had read this phrase in a book translated from the Spanish.

"Seigneur cavalier, if I find your discretion to be proved, you shall see me more than once with my face uncovered, but for tonight you must be content with the pleasures of conversation."

"Ah! Great as that pleasure is, madame, it makes me only long more ardently to see you."

He knelt and seemed disposed to raise the mask.

"*Poco a poco,* Seigneur Frenchman! You are too fast. Keep your distance or I shall leave you this instant. If you knew who I am and what I dare in order to see you, you would be content with the honor alone I do you of coming here."

"Really, I think your voice is familiar to me."

"Nevertheless, this is the first time you have heard it. Tell me, could you love a woman faithfully who loved you?"

"Since I have been with you I have felt——"

"You have never seen me, so you cannot love me. Do you know if I am fair or ugly?"

"I am certain that you are charming."

The incognita withdrew the hand he had seized and raised it to her mask as if to take it off.

"Now, what would you do if you saw before you a woman fifty years old and frightfully hideous?"

"That is impossible."

"Yet at fifty years one can love still." She sighed as she spoke and the young man shuddered.

"Your charming form, the hand you try in vain to rob me of, everything indicates your youth."

But there was more gallantry than assurance in his speech.

"Alas!"

Mergy began to feel a certain alarm.

"Love is not enough for you men. You must have beauty, too." And then she sighed once more.

"Grant me the pleasure of taking off that mask."

"No, no!" and she repulsed him vivaciously. "Remember your promise!" Then she added in a gayer tone, "I

should risk too much if I were to unmask. I like to see you at my feet; and if by chance I were neither young nor fair—and little to your taste—you might leave me disconsolate."

"At least show me that little hand."

She drew off a perfumed glove and held out toward him a hand as white as snow.

"I know that hand!" he cried. "There is only one as fair in all Paris."

"Truly! To whom does it belong?"

"To—a countess."

"What countess?"

"The Countess de Turgis."

"Ah!—I know those you speak of. Yes, Madame de Turgis has beautiful hands, thanks to her perfumer's paste of almonds. But I think I can boast that mine are much softer than hers."

All this was said in a very natural tone of voice, and Mergy, who thought he recognized the voice of the beautiful Countess, grew doubtful and felt as if he must give up the idea.

"Two instead of one!" he thought. "Am I then a protégé of the fairies?" And he tried to discover on the lovely hand the mark of a ring he had seen Madame de Turgis wear. But the round and perfectly shaped fingers did not show the slightest mark nor the faintest trace.

"Madame de Turgis!" the incognita cried again, laughing. "Truly, I am obliged to you for mistaking me for her! Thank God! It seems to me I have a little the advantage."

"On my honor, the Countess is the most beautiful woman I have ever seen."

"Are you in love with her, then?"

"Perhaps; but I beg you to take off your mask and show me a woman more beautiful than la Turgis."

"When I am certain that you love me—then you shall see my face uncovered."

"Love you! But *morbleu!* How is it possible without seeing you?"

"This hand is pretty; imagine a face in accord with it."

"Now I know you are charming, for you have just betrayed yourself by dropping the disguise of your voice. I recognized it, of that I am certain."

"And is it the voice of Madame de Turgis?" she said, laughing, and with a strongly pronounced Spanish accent.

"Exactly."

"Wrong, wrong, Siegneur Bernardo; I am called Dona Maria—Dona Maria de——I shall tell you my other name later. I am a lady of Barcelona; my father, who keeps strict watch over me, has been traveling for some time and I profit by his absence to amuse myself and see the French Court. As for Madame de Turgis, I beg you cease speaking of that woman to me; her very name is odious to me; there is no more spiteful women at the Court. And do you know how she became a widow?"

"I have heard something."

"Good! Speak! What did they tell you?"

"That finding her husband in a very tender conversation with the waiting maid, she thereupon seized a dagger and dealt him a hard blow with it. The man died a month later."

"And does that act seem horrible to you?"

"I must confess that I can pardon her. They say she loved her husband, and I esteem jealousy."

"You say that because you think yourself to be with la Turgis; but I know at heart you despise her." There was something sad and melancholy in her voice, but it was not the voice of la Turgis. Mergy did not know what to think.

"What!" he said; "you are Spanish and do not respect jealousy?"

"No matter. What is that black ribbon you wear about your neck?"

"It is a relic."

"I thought you were a Protestant."

"That is true. But this relic was given me by a woman and I wear it as a souvenir of her."

"Ah! If you wish to please me you will think no more of other women. I wish to be more to you than all other women. Who gave you the relic? Was is Madame de Turgis?"

"No, truly."

"You do not speak the truth!"

"Then you are Madame de Turgis?"

"You have betrayed yourself, Seigneur Bernardo."

"How?"

"When I see la Turgis I shall ask her why she committed the sacrilege of giving a holy thing to a heretic."

Mergy's bewilderment redoubled each moment.

"I want the relic. Give it to me."

"No, I cannot give it away."

"I will have it. Dare you refuse me?"

"I promised to return it to the giver."

"Bah! A childish promise that! Promises made to false women are not binding. Besides, take heed; it is a charm perhaps, a dangerous talisman that you are wearing. La Turgis, they say, is a great enchantress."

"I do not believe in magic."

"Nor in magicians?"

"I believe a little in witches," and he laid stress on the last word.

"Listen to me! Give me the relic and perhaps I shall take off my mask."

"Now—that is the voice of Madame de Turgis."

"For the last time—will you give me that relic?"

"I will give it back to you if you take off that mask."

"Ah! You make me impatient with your de Turgis; love her as much as you please—what care I?"

She turned about in her chair as if irritated. The satin veiling her bosom rose and sank rapidly.

For some moments she remained silent; then suddenly turning, she said in a mocking voice: *"Vale me Dios!*

V. M. no es cabellero, es un mongei." (God forgive me! You are not a cavalier, you are a monk!)

With a wave of her hand she overturned the two wax lights burning on the table and half the bottles and dishes. The flambeaux went out in an instant. At the same time she tore off her mask. In the most complete darkness Mergy felt burning lips seeking his and two arms embracing him closely.

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE DARK.

"La nuit tous les chats sont gris."

The clock of a church nearby struck four times.

"Heavens! Four o'clock? I shall have little time to reach home before daylight."

"What! You are cruel. Leave me so soon!"

"I must, but we shall soon see each other again."

"See each other again? You forget, dear Countess, that I have not seen you yet!"

"Never mind your Countess, infant that you are! I am Dona Maria, and when we have light you will see that I am not she for whom you take me."

"To what side is the door? I shall call some one."

"No, Bernardo, let me go down alone; I know the room and where I can find a light."

"Take good care not to step on the bits of glass; you broke enough last night."

"I shall take care."

"What have you there?"

"Ah! Yes, that is my bodice! Holy Virgin! What shall I do? I cut all the laces with your dagger."

"We must ask the old woman for some."

"Do not stir; leave it to me. *Adios querido Bernardo!*

The door opened and shut immediately. A long burst of laughter sounded outside. Mergy noticed that his conquest had escaped him. He tried to pursue her, but in the dark he bumped against the furniture and entangled himself in garments and curtains without finding the door. Suddenly it opened and some one entered holding a dark lantern. Mergy seized the lantern-bearer at once.

"Ah! I have you; you cannot escape me this time," he cried, giving a tender embrace.

"Now, let me alone, Monsieur de Mergy," said a gruff voice. "Is that the way you squeeze people?"

He recognized the old woman. "May the Devil take you!" he exclaimed.

He adjusted his clothing in silence, took up his weapons and his mantle, and left the house in the temper of a man who, after drinking fine Malaga wine, then swallows by his servant's carelessness a glass of anti-scorbutic, which has been left forgotten in the cellar for long years.

Mergy was cautious enough with his brother; he told him of a Spanish woman of great beauty as far as he could tell in the absence of any light, but he did not mention a word of his suspicions concerning the incognita.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE AVOWAL.

Amphitrion: Ah! de grâce, cessons, Alcmène je vous prie,
Et parlons sérieusement.

MOLIÈRE, *Amphitrion.*

Two days passed without any message from the pretended Spaniard. On the third the brothers learned that Madame de Turgis had arrived in Paris the day before and would certainly go to pay her respects to the Queen Mother during the course of the day. They went immediately to the Louvre and found her in a gallery at the center of a group of women with whom she was conversing. The sight of Mergy did not seem to cause her the slightest emotion. Nor did the faintest blush color her generally pale cheeks. As soon as she saw him she nodded to him as to an old acquaintance, and after preliminary compliments were exchanged she leaned toward him and whispered:

"Your Huguenot obstinacy is a little shaken by now, I hope? It took miracles to convert you."

"What do you mean?"

"What! Have you not experienced for yourself the marvelous effect of the virtues of relics?"

Mergy smiled incredulously.

"The memory of the beautiful hand that gave me this little box and the love it inspired in me double my strength and skill."

She shook her finger threateningly at him with a laugh.

"You are becoming impertinent, Monsieur Cornet! Do you know to whom you speak in this manner?"

As she spoke she drew off her glove to arrange her hair, and Mergy stared at the hand and from it carried his glance to the wide-open, almost michievous, eyes of the beautiful Countess. She burst out laughing at the astonished expression of the young man.

"Why do you laugh?"

"And why do you look at me with an air of astonishment?"

"Pardon me, but for some days past I encounter only things which astonish me."

"Really! That is more curious. Tell me quickly some of these surprising things happening to you at every moment."

"I cannot tell you now or here; besides, I recall a certain Spanish motto I was taught three days ago."

"What motto?"

"A single word: Callad."

"What does that mean?"

"Oh! But do you not know Spanish?" he said, watching her very attentively.

But she stood his examination without allowing it to appear that she detected a hidden meaning in his words; and the young man's eyes, fixed on hers, had indeed to drop in forced recognition of the superior spirit in those he dared to challenge.

"In my childhood," she said with an air of perfect indifference, "I knew several words of Spanish, but I think I have forgotten them now. So speak to me in French if you wish me to understand you. Come, what is the sense of your motto?"

"It recommends discretion, madame."

"By my faith! It would be a good motto for our young courtiers to adopt, especially if they could justify it by their conduct. But you are very learned, Monsieur de Mergy! Who, then, taught you Spanish? I wager it was a woman."

Mergy looked at her tenderly and smiled.

"I know only a word or two of Spanish," he said in a low voice, "and love engraved them on my memory."

"Love!" repeated the Countess, in a mocking voice.

As she spoke rather loudly, several women turned their heads at the word as if to ask what was the matter. Mergy, a little piqued at the mockery, and not liking to

be treated in this manner, took the Spanish letter he had received from the old woman out of his pocket and presented it to the Countess:

"I have no doubt," he said, "that you are as learned as I am, and will understand the Spanish in that letter without difficulty."

Diane seized the note, pretended to read it and, laughing immoderately, handed it to a woman who stood near her.

"Here, Madame de Châteauvieux, read this billet-doux which Monsieur de Mergy received from his mistress and whom he sacrifices to me, so he says. The best of it is that I recognize the handwriting."

"Undoubtedly," said Mergy rather sharply, but still in a whisper.

Madame de Châteauvieux read the note, laughed, passed it on to a gentleman who, in turn, passed it on to another; and in a short time there was not a person in the gallery who was ignorant of the fact that Mergy had received a letter from a Spanish woman.

When the peals of laughter had somewhat subsided the Countess asked Mergy with an air of raillery if he thought the woman who wrote the note was beautiful.

"Upon my honor, madame, I do not think her so beautiful as you."

"Heavens! What are you saying? You could have seen her only at night, because I know her well and—by my faith! I wish you joy of your good fortune."

And then she began to laugh very loudly.

"Come, pretty one," said la Châteauvieux, "give us the name of the Spanish woman who has the good fortune to possess Monsieur de Mergy's heart."

"Before I name her I beg you, Monsieur de Mergy, to declare to these women whether you have ever seen your mistress by day?"

Mergy began to feel very ill at ease, and his embarrassment and vexation were visible on his countenance in an amusing manner. But he did not say anything.

"Without further mystery," said the Countess, "this note is from the Senora Maria Rodriguez; I know her handwriting as well as my own father's."

"Maria Rodriguez!" exclaimed all the women with a shout of laughter.

Maria Rodriguez was a woman more than fifty years old. She had been a duenna at Madrid. She had come to Paris, no one knew how nor for which of her qualities Marguerite de Valois had taken her into the household. Perhaps she kept the old monster to set off her own charms by contrast, just as painters put the character of a dwarf upon the same canvas with some beauty of the day. When Donna Maria sometimes appeared at the Louvre she amused all the women at Court by her awkward behavior and old-fashioned costume.

Mergy shuddered. He had seen the duenna and recollected with horror that the masked woman had given the name of Maria; his memories became confused; he was visibly disconcerted and the laughter redoubled.

"She is a person of the greatest discretion," said Countess de Turgis, "and you could not have made a better choice. She really looks very well when she has her teeth in place and wears her black perrouque. And, besides, she is certainly not more than sixty years old."

"She must have bewitched him!" cried la Châteauvieux.

"Are you an admirer of antiques?" asked another woman.

"What a pity," said one of the Queen's young women very low and sighing, "that men will have such ridiculous caprices."

Mergy defended himself as well as he could. Ironical congratulations were showered upon him, and he made a very poor figure when the King, appearing at the end of the gallery, put an end to all the pleasantries. Each hurried to his place and the most perfect silence succeeded the tumult.

The King was leading out the Admiral, with whom he had been holding a long conference in his cabinet. He leaned familiarly with his hand on the shoulder of Coligny, whose gray beard and black costume formed a striking contrast to the youthful appearance and brilliantly embroidered garments of Charles. To see them one would say that the young monarch had chosen as his favorite the wisest and most virtuous of his subjects with rare discernment.

As they crossed the gallery and all eyes were fixed upon them, Mergy heard the Countess whisper in his ear:

"Do not be angry! Take this and look at it only after you are alone."

At the same time something fell into his hat which he held in his hand. It was a sealed paper containing something hard. He put it in his pocket, and a quarter of an hour after he had left the Louvre he opened it and found a small key with the following note:

"This key opens my garden gate. Tonight at ten. I love you. I shall not be masked and at last you will see Dona Maria and——

"DIANE."

The King led the Admiral to the end of the gallery.

"Adieu, my father," he said, pressing his hand. "You know I love you, and I know you are mine, body and soul, head and entrails."

At this he laughed heartily, and then, as he was returning to his cabinet, he stopped before Captain George:

"Tomorrow after mass," he said, "come to see me in my cabinet, I wish to speak to you."

He then turned his head uneasily towards the door through which Coligny had just passed out, and left the gallery with Marshal de Retz.

CHAPTER XVII

THE PRIVATE AUDIENCE

Macbeth: Do you find
Your patience so predominant in your nature,
That you can let this go?

SHAKESPEARE, *Macbeth.*

Captain George went to the Louvre at the appointed hour. As soon as he gave his name the officer, drawing aside a hanging of tapestry, introduced him into the cabinet of the King. The King, who was seated at a little table in the attitude of writing, motioned him to remain silent as if he feared by talking to lose the thread of ideas which occupied him at the moment. The captain remained standing in an attitude of respect at about six paces from the table and had leisure to notice the apartment and observe its decorations in detail.

They were very simple, for they consisted of little more than equipment for the chase hung in disorder upon the wall. A very fine picture of a Virgin with a great branch of boxwood over it was suspended between a long arquebus and a hunting horn. The table upon which the monarch wrote was covered with papers and books. A rosary and a small "Book of Hours" lay on the floor pell-mell with nets and hawk's bells. A large grayhound was sleeping on the cushion near by.

Suddenly the King threw his pen down on the floor in a rage and, muttering a tremendous oath between his teeth, paced the floor of the cabinet two or three times with uncertain steps and bowed head. Then, as if seeing George for the first time, he stared at him:

"Ah! Is it you?" he said starting back a step.

The captain bowed to the floor.

"I am glad to see you. I have something to say to you—but——" he stopped. His mouth half open, his neck craned, his left foot advanced some six inches

ahead of his right—in other words in the position which, it seems to me, a painter would picture a figure representing attention—thus stood George awaiting the conclusion of the sentence. But the King let his head sink to his chest again and seemed occupied with ideas two thousand leagues away from those for which he had explicitly appointed the hour.

They both remained silent for some minutes. The King sat down at length and rested his head on his hand as if fatigued.

"The Devil take the rhyme!" he cried stamping his foot on the floor and making the room echo with the clang of the long spurs upon his boots.

Taking the movement of the feet as a signal the greyhound suddenly awoke and going to the King's chair put his fore paws upon the King's knees, raised his slender head, which surpassed that of Charles in beauty, opened his great jaws and yawned without the least ceremony—it is so difficult to teach a dog the manners of court.

The King pushed the dog away, who thereupon sighed and curled up again. And looking at the captain he said to him:

"Excuse me, George, but this * * * rhyme has almost turned my brain."

(We let the reader supply an epithet. Charles IX used oaths truly energetic, though anything but elegant.)

"Perhaps I disturb your Majesty," said George, bowing most reverently.

"Not at all, not at all," said the King. He arose, laying a hand on the captain's shoulder in a familiar way. He smiled at the same time, but only with the lips, his eyes taking no part in it.

"Are you still fatigued with your last day's chase?" said the King, evidently embarassed for a mode of beginning. "The stag kept us long at bay."

"Sire, I should be unfit to command the light horse troop in your Majesty's service if a ride like that of the

day before yesterday could fatigue me. The Duke of Guise gave me the surname of 'The Albanian' during the late wars, because he always saw me on horseback."

"Yes, I have heard that you are an excellent horseman. But tell me, are you also a good shot with the arquebus?"

"I can use the arquebus fairly well, Sire, though I am far from having your Majesty's skill. But then such skill is not given to everyone."

"Well, do you see that long arquebuss? Load it with a dozen buck shot. I will be damned if, at sixty paces, you do not lodge every one of them in the breast of any scoundrel at whom you may aim!"

"Sixty paces—that is a long range; but I should rather not make a trial with a marksman like your Majesty."

"And at two hundred paces it would send a ball of the right caliber into a man's body."

The King placed the arquebus into the captain's hands.

"It seems as fine as its rich mountings," said George after he had examined it carefully and tried the lock.

"I see you know about arms, my brave Captain. Take aim with it so I can see how you go to work."

The captain obeyed.

"An arquebus is a beautiful thing," continued Charles, speaking slowly. "At a hundred paces and with one movement of the finger, like this, one is sure of ridding himself of an enemy, and neither coat of mail nor cuirass will keep out a bullet."

I have already said that Charles IX hardly ever looked at the face of the person to whom he was speaking, either from a trick of his infancy or from natural timidity. But this time he looked fixedly at the captain with a singlar expression. George dropped his eyes involuntarily and the King almost immediately did the same. Then there was a moment of silence; George was the first to break it.

"However skilful a man may be with firearms, the sword and lance are, after all, much surer——"

"Yes, but the arquebus——" Charles smiled strangely. Then he began again: "They say, George, that the Admiral has grievously insulted you?"

"Sire——"

"I know it. I am certain of it. But I should like—I wish that you would tell me the story yourself."

"It is true, Sire, I was talking to him about an unfortunate affair in which I had the greatest interest——"

"Your brother's duel. *Parbleu!* A splendid young fellow! Kills his man handsomely; I esteem him; Comminges was a fop; he got only what he deserved. But *mort de ma vie!* How the Devil did old Graybeard find occasion in this to pick a quarrel with you?"

"I fear unfortunate differences in belief and my conversion, which I thought forgotten——"

"Forgotten?"

"Your Majesty having set the example of forgetting religious dissension, and your Majesty's rare and impartial justice—"

"Learn, my comrade, that the Admiral never forgets anything."

"I have noticed that, Sire." And George's expression darkened.

"Tell me, Captain, what you intend doing?"

"I, Sire?"

"Yes, speak frankly."

"Sire, I am too poor a gentleman and the Admiral is too old a man for me to think of calling him out for a duel; and besides, Sire," added he, bowing as if to temper by a courtly phrase what might seem too bold a speech to the King, "if it were possible, I fear to lose your Majesty's good graces by it."

"Bah!" cried the King. And he rested his right hand on George's shoulder.

"Luckily," continued the captain, "my honor is not in the Admiral's hands; and if anyone of my rank dared

to raise any doubt about my honor, then I should plead before your Majesty to permit me to——"

"That means, then, that you will not take revenge on the Admiral? But—he grows excessively insolent."

George opened his eyes in amazement.

"And furthermore," the King continued, "he has insulted you, he has, yes the Devil take me! grievously insulted you if what they tell me——A gentleman is not a lackey and there are things which one cannot endure even from a prince."

"How am I able to avenge myself on him? He would think it beneath his birth to duel with me."

"Perhaps. But——" The King picked up the arquebus and again took aim.

"Do you understand me?"

The captain recoiled two steps. The gesture of the monarch was clear enough and the diabolical expression on his countenance explained it only more clearly.

"What! Sire, you counsel me——?"

The King pounded the butt of the arquebus vehemently upon the floor, and looking at the captain with furious eyes he said:

"I counsel you! By the Body of God! I counsel you nothing!"

The captain did not know what to reply; he did what many people would have done in his place—he bowed and lowered his eyes.

Charles continued in a very mild tone:

"If you rid yourself of him by a straight shot from the arquebus to avenge your honor—I cannot say that I should greatly care. *Par les boyaux du Pape!* A gentleman has no more precious possession than his honor, and there is no length to which he may not go to keep it safe. And these Châtillons are as proud and insolent as the Hangman's varlets; the knaves would twist my neck, I know, and take my place. Sometimes when I see the Admiral a hatred seizes me so that I wish to tear out all the hairs of his beard!"

To this torrent of words from a man ordinarily not wasteful of them the captain answered never a word.

"Well," continued the King, "By the Blood and by the Head! What are you going to do? In your place I should wait until he comes from his—meeting-house and from a window send an excellent arquebus shot through his loins. *Parbleu!* My cousin of Guise would be grateful to you for it, and you would have done much for the peace of the Kingdom. Do you know that this heretic is more of a King of France than I am myself? That bores me to extinction. I shall tell you outright what I think—we must teach the * * * that he must not touch the honor of a gentleman. A blemish in one's honor, a blemish in one's skin—the one pays for the other."

"The honor of a gentleman is ended not mended by assassination."

This answer struck the Prince like a bolt of thunder. Immobile, his hands extended toward the captain, he still grasped the arquebus which he had apparently offered as an instrument of vengeance. His mouth was bloodless and half opened, while his haggard eyes fixed on George's seemed to spear them and at the same time to receive a horrid fascination from them.

At last the arquebus dropped from the trembling hands of the King and made the planks echo as it fell. The captain stooped at once to pick it up, and the King again sat down in his chair, dropping his head in a somber manner. The hasty movements of his mouth and eyes announced the struggle that was going on in his heart.

"Captain," he said after a long silence, "where is your company of light horsemen?"

"At Meaux, Sire."

"In a few days you shall join it and bring it yourself to Paris. In—yes, in a day or two you shall have orders. Adieu!" There was still a harsh and angry accent in his voice. The captain bowed deeply, and Charles,

motioning with his hand to the door of the cabinet, announced that his audience was at an end.

The captain was retiring backwards with the usual bow of respect when the King rose and impetuously seized his arm:

"Keep your mouth shut at least! You understand me?"

George bowed and placed his hand on his breast. As he left the apartment he heard the King harshly calling to his grayhound and cracking his hunting whip as if disposed to relieve his wrath on the innocent animal.

Upon his return to his house George wrote the following letter, which he sent to the Admiral:

"One who does not love you, but who loves honor, bids you beware of the Duke of Guise and of some one perhaps still more powerful. Your life is menaced."

This letter produced no effect on the intrepid soul of Coligny. Everyone knows that a short time after, on the 22d of August, 1572, he was wounded with an arquebus shot by a scoundrel named Maurevel, who received from the deed the nickname of "The King's Butcher."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CATECHUMEN

'Tis pleasing to be schooled in a strange tongue
By female lips and eyes.

LORD BYRON, *Don Juan; Canto II.*

When two lovers act with discretion sometimes an entire week passes before the public is admitted to their confidence. After that time prudence relaxes; precaution seems ridiculous; a glance of the eye is easily surprised, more easily interpreted, and all is revealed.

Thus it was not a long time before the liaison between the Countess de Turgis and young Mergy ceased to be a secret at the court of Catherine. A crowd of convincing proofs were sufficient to open even blind eyes. For Madame de Turgis usually wore lilac ribbons, and rosettes of lilac ribbons ornamented the hilt of Bernard's sword, the skirts of his doublet and his shoes. The Countess confessed very publicly her dislike for beards and her admiration for a well turned-up mustache; some time later Mergy's chin was carefully shaved while his moustache, ferociously curled, pomaded and trained with a leaden comb, formed a crescent with points rising well above his nose. Finally, people had the impertinence to say that a certain gentleman passing very early one morning through the Rue de Assis had seen the gate of the Countess' garden open and a man come out who, though enveloped in a mantle up to his nose, had been easily recognized as the Seigneur de Mergy.

But the most conclusive proof, and the most surprising to the world, was the sight of the young Huguenot, the pitiless derider of all the ceremonies of the Catholic faith, assiduously frequenting the churches every day, never missing the processions, and even dipping his fingers in the holy water which a few days before he would have considered as a horrible sacrilege. Men

whispered to each other that Diane had gained a soul for God; and young gentlemen of the Reformed Religion declared that they would perhaps dream seriously of conversion if, instead of Capuchins and Franciscans, they selected youthful and beautiful devotees like Madame de Turgis to convert them.

Bernard, however, was far from being converted. It is true he accompanied the Countess to church, but then he sat next to her and whispered in her ear during the entire mass to the great scandal of the devout. Thus, he was not only inattentive to the service himself, but also prevented devout persons from paying full attention to it. As to the processions—one knows that then they were mere pleasure parties as amusing as a masquerade. And, finally, Mergy made no scruple about dipping his finger in holy water simply because it gave him the opportunity of pressing in public a beautiful hand which he never touched without a tremble. For the rest, although he kept his faith, he had to fight hard for it; and Diane argued against him to the greater advantage in that she usually chose for the purpose of theological disputes the moments when it was hardest for Mergy to refuse her anything.

"Dear Bernard," she said one evening, leaning her head on her lover's shoulder and letting her long black hair fall about his throat—"dear Bernard, you were at church with me today. Well! The wonderful prayers—did they produce no effect on your heart? Will you always remain insensitive?"

"But, my dear! How can you think that the nasal voice of a Capuchin can do what your sweet voice cannot with religious arguments so well aided with loving expressions, my Diane?"

"Sinner! I shall strangle you!" And pulling one of the locks of her hair slightly she drew him to her still more closely.

"Do you know how I spent my time during the ser-

mon? Counting all the pearls in your hair. Just see how you have spilled them about the room!"

"I was sure of it! You did not listen to the sermon! It is always the same story. Now," she said wistfully, "I see very well that you do not love me as I do you. If you did you would have been converted long ago."

"Ah! My Diane! Why this eternal discussion? Let us leave it to the Sorbonne doctors and our preachers, and let us pass our own time better!"

"Let me go—if I could only save you, how happy I should be! Why, Bernard, to save you I would double the number of years that I shall have to spend in Purgatory!"

He pressed her in his arms smiling, but she repulsed him with an air of indescribable sadness.

"You, Bernard, would not do that for me; you are not disturbed by the risk my soul takes when I give myself to you!——" And tears filled her eyes.

"*Chère amie*, do you not know that love pardons nearly everything and——"

"Yes, I know that well enough. But if I could save your soul all my sins would be forgiven me; all those I have done and all those we may do hereafter—all would be forgiven. How shall I put it? Our sins themselves would be the instrument of our salvation."

And as she spoke she pressed her arms with all her strength around him, and the vehement enthusiasm animating her speech in this situation had something so comical about it that Mergy had some difficulty in stifling an outburst of laughter at this strange manner of preaching.

"Put your converting off a little longer, my Diane," he said. "When we are both old—when we are both too old to love then——"

"You drive me to despair, you rogue! Why that diabolical smile on your lips? Do you think I burn to kiss them now?"

"You see I am not smiling now."

"Come, be still; and tell me, *querido Bernardo,* have you read the book I gave you?"

"Yes, I finished it yesterday."

"Good! How did you like it? There is reason! And that closes the mouths of the incredulous."

"Your book, my Diane, is only a tissue of falshoods and impertinence. It is the most nonsensical book that has yet come from the Papist press. I wager that you have never read it, you who speak to me about it with so much assurance."

"No, I have not read it yet," she answered, and reddened a little. "But I am certain it is full of reason and truth. I do not wish any other proof than the persistence of the Huguenots in decrying it."

"Shall I, to pass the time, take the Bible in hand and show you——?"

"Oh! Keep it to yourself, Bernard! Mercy on me! I have not read the Bible like you heretics! I do not wish you to weaken my faith. And, besides, you would only waste your time. All you Huguenots are always armed with a scholarship that drives one to despair. You drag it in by the nose when you argue, and the poor Catholics who have not read Aristotle and the Bible as you have do not know what to answer."

"Ah! That is because all Catholics choose to believe at any price without giving yourselves the trouble to examine whether the belief is reasonable or not. We at least study our religion before defending it and especially before trying to make converts of others."

"Ah! I wish I had the eloquence of Reverend Father Giron the Franciscan."

"He is a fool and a braggart. But though he shouted six years ago with all his shouting in a public discussion, our minister Houdart argued him down."

"Lies! Heretic lies!"

"What! Do you not know that in the course of the discussion one saw great drops of perspiration fall from

the good Father's brow on the Chrysostom he held in his hand? Thereupon a wit made these rhymes——"

"I do not wish to hear them! Do not poison my ears with heresy. Bernard! My dear Bernard! I conjure you not to listen to all these agents of Satan who delude you and lead you Hellward. I implore you to save your soul and return to our Church!" And since, despite these entreaties, she still read the smile of skepticism on her lover's lips—"if you love me," she cried, "renounce for me, and for love of me, your damnable belief."

"It would be easier, dearest Diane, to renounce my life for you than what my reason shows me to be true. How can you wish even love to prevent my believing that two and two make four?"

"Cruel!——"

But Bernard had an infallible method for terminating discussions of this kind and he employed it.

"Alas! dear Bernard," said the Countess in a laughing voice when the approaching day obliged Mergy to leave her, "I damn my soul for you and yet I see only too well that I shall not have the consolation of saving yours."

"Come now, my angel! Father Giron will give us both a good absolution *in articulo mortis.*"

CHAPTER XIX

THE FRANCISCAN

Monachus in claustra
Non valet ova duo;
Sed quando est extra
Bene valet triginta.

The morning after the marriage of Marguerite with the King of Navarre, Captain George, by an order from the Court, left Paris to take command of his light horse troop then garrisoned at Meaux. His brother gaily told him goodby and, hoping to see him again before the end of the festivities, made up his mind with a good grace to be alone for a number of days. Madame de Turgis occupied his time sufficiently for him not to be desperately lonely during moments of solitude. At night he was never at home and during the day he slept.

On Friday the 22d of August, 1572, the Admiral was severely wounded by an arquebus shot given by a scoundrel named Maurevel. Public rumor attributed this cowardly attempt at assassination to the Duke of Guise, and that lord left Paris the following day to get out of the way of complaints and menaces from the Reformers. At first it seemed as if the King wanted to prosecute him to the last extremity; but he made no opposition to his return, which was signaled by the horrible massacre of the twenty fourth of August.

A great number of well-mounted young Protestant gentlemen, after paying a visit to the Admiral, scattered throughout the streets with the intention of hunting down Guise or any of his friends and starting a quarrel with them if they met. Everything at first passed quietly enough. The populace, alarmed at their numbers or perhaps biding their time, kept silent as they went by and heard their shouts of "Death to the assassins of Monsieur the Admiral! Down with the Guisards!" without showing emotion.

At one street corner about a dozen young Catholic gentlemen, and among them more than one follower of the house of Guise, suddenly faced the Protestant troop.

A serious fracas seemed imminent, but nothing happened. The Catholics did not reply to the insulting cries of the Protestants perhaps out of prudence, perhaps acting under orders; and a young man of good appearance who was at their head advanced toward Mergy, saluted him politely and said to him in a familiar and friendly tone:

"Good day, Monsieur de Mergy. You have no doubt seen Monsieur de Châtillion? How is he? Has the assassin been captured?"

The two troops halted. Mergy recognized Baron de Vaudreuil, who returned his salutation and answered his questions. Other specific remarks were exchanged, and as this took but a short time they separated without dispute. The Catholics yielded the center of the street and each company went its own way.

Vaudreuil detained Mergy for some time, so that he was somewhat apart from his companions. As they parted Vaudreuil examined Mergy's saddle and said:

"Watch out! Unless I am mistaken your horse is badly girthed. Attend to it."

Mergy dismounted and girthed his horse. He had hardly remounted when he heard a loud trot behind him. He turned his head and saw a young man whose face was unfamiliar but who made one of the party he had just met.

"*Dieu me damne!*" cried the latter addressing him, "I would like to meet one of those fellows alone who cried 'Down with the Guisards' just now."

"You need not go very far to find one," replied Mergy. "How can I serve you?"

"Are you by chance one of the scoundrels?"

Mergy drew at once and struck the friend of the Guises across the face with the flat of his sword. The latter immediately seized a holster pistol and fired it point blank at Mergy. Fortunately, it flashed in the pan, and Diane's lover replied with a strong blow on his enemies head which stretched him at his horses feet bathed in his own blood. The entire populace, which up

until now had remained passive, instantly took the side of the wounded man. The young Huguenot was assailed with blows from sticks and stones and, as all resistance against such a mob was futile, he set both spurs to his hourse and left at a gallop. As he attempted to turn a sharp corner the horse fell and threw him without hurting him but also without giving him a chance to mount quickly enough to save himself from being surrounded by the infuriated populace. So he backed to the wall and for a time kept off those who came within reach of his sword. But a terrific blow from a cudgel shivered his blade, he fell to the ground and would have been torn to pieces if a monk who was ahead of the approaching mob had not covered him with his own body.

"What are you doing, children?" he cried. "Let the man alone; he is not to blame."

"He is a Huguenot!" howled a hundred angry voices.

"Good! Give him time to repent. He can still do so."

The hands that grasped Mergy relaxed at once. He rose and picking up his broken sword prepared to sell his life dearly if he had to stand a fresh attack.

"Let the man live!" repeated the monk, "and be patient. In a short time all Huguenots will come to the Mass."

"Patience? Patience?" echoed several sneering voices. "We have heard patience preached for a long time now and yet every Sunday in their conventicles they offend honest Christians with their psalms."

"Eh! Do you remember the proverb," said the monk cheerfully, "that goes 'The owl sings long, but at last gets hoarse?' Let them bray a little longer; you shall soon hear them chant the Mass in Latin by the grace of our Lady of August. But as for this young *parpaillot,* leave him to me. I shall make him a good Christian. Begone and do not burn the roast in your haste to eat it."

The crowd dispersed grumbling but without offering Mergy the slightest insult. One of them even caught his horse for him.

"This is the first time in my life," he said, "that I ever took pleasure in seeing that costume, Father. Believe in my gratitude and pray accept this purse."

"If you mean it for the poor, my boy, I shall accept it. Know that I am interested in you. I know your brother and I wish you well. Be converted today: come with me and your affair shall be settled at once."

"Thank you for that, Father. But I have not the least wish to be converted. How do you know me? What is your name?"

"Men call me Brother Lubin—and I think—little rascal, I have often seen you near a certain house. But hush—tell me Monsieur de Mergy, do you believe that a monk can do a good deed?"

"I shall publish your generous conduct everywhere, Father Lubin."

"You will not stop going to the Mass?"

"Once more, no; but I never go to church except to hear your sermons."

"You are evidently a man of taste."

"And your great admirer."

"Upon my word, I am sorry that you persist in heresy. I have warned you; I have done the little I could, come what may; as for me, I wash my hands of the matter. Goodbye, my boy!"

"Goodbye, Father!"

Mergy mounted his horse and returned to his lodgings a little bruised but well content at having made such a good march through such a dangerous pass.

CHAPTER XX.

THE LIGHT HORSE TROOP.

Jaffier: He amongst us
That spares his father, brother, or his friend,
Is damned.

OTWAY, *Venice Preserved.*

On the evening of the 24th of August a company of light horsemen entered Paris by the Gate of Saint-Antoine. The boots and uniforms of the riders were all covered with dust, showing that they had ridden hard and long. The last rays of daylight illuminated their sunburned faces. One could read there the vague anxiety one feels at the approach of an event the nature of which is not yet entirely known, but is suspected to be disastrous.

The troop rode at a slow gait to a wide clearing free from houses that extended along the old palace of the Tournelles. Here their captain ordered them to halt, dispatched a dozen men under his cornet to reconnoitre, and posted sentinels with fuses burning at the entrances to the neighboring streets as if in the presence of an enemy. After taking this extraordinary precaution, he returned to the front ranks of his company.

"Sergeant!" he cried, in a sterner and more imperious tone than was his custom.

An old trooper, his hat decorated with a gold stripe and wearing an embroidered scarf, respectfully approached his chief.

"Are all of our troopers supplied with fuses?"

"Yes, Captain."

"Are the powder horns full? Are there plenty of bullets?"

"Yes, Captain."

"Good." And he walked his mare along the front rank

of his little troop. The sergeant followed him a horse's length away. He noticed his captain's bad temper and hesitated to approach him. Finally he took courage.

"Captain, may I give the men permission to give their beasts fodder? You know they have not eaten since morning."

"No."

"A handful of oats? That would not take long."

"Not a horse shall be unbridled."

"Because if they have to work tonight, as men say, perhaps then——"

The officer made a gesture of impatience.

"Return to your post!" he said curtly. And he continued his promenade. The sergeant returned to his soldiers.

"Well then, Sergeant, is it true? What will be done? What is up? What does the captain say?"

Twenty questions at once were asked him by soldiers whose long service and old habit authorized this liberty with their superior.

"We shall soon see something fine," said the sergeant, in the important tone of a man who knows more than he tells.

"How? What?"

"We are not to take the bridles off; not for an instant—because, who knows? We may be needed at any moment."

"Ah! Are we going to see fighting?" said the trumpeter. "And with whom, if you please?"

"With whom," said the sergeant, repeating the words to give himself time for reflection. "*Parbleu!* A fine question! Against whom would you fight but the enemies of the King?"

"Yes, but who are these enemies of the King?" continued the opinionated questioner.

"The King's enemies! He does not know who the King's enemies are!" And he shrugged his shoulders pityingly.

"The Spaniards are the King's enemies, but they can

hardly have come up like this in a cloud of darkness without anyone knowing it," remarked one of the horsemen.

"Bah!" retorted another, "I know plenty of enemies of the King who are not Spaniards."

"Bertrand is right," said the sergeant, "and I know well what he means."

"And who, then, are they?"

"The Huguenots," said Bertrand. "One need not be a magician to see that. All the world knows that the Huguenots took their religion from Germany; and I am very sure the Germans are our enemies because I have quite often exchanged pistol shots with them, notably at Saint Quentin, where they fought like devils."

"All that is very fine," said the trumpeter, "but peace has been concluded with them and there was a fanfare of noise enough on that occasion to make one remember it."

"The proof that they are not our enemies," said a young trooper better dressed than the others, "is that the Count de la Rochefaucauld will command the light horse troops in the war we are going to wage in Flanders; now, who does not know that la Rochefaucauld is of that religion? Devil take me if he is not of it from his head to his feet! He has spurs *à la Condé* and wears a hat *à la Huguenot.*"

"May the plague take him!" cried the sergeant. "You do not know, Merlin; you were not with us at that time; it was la Rochefoucauld who commanded the ambush where we all of us barely escaped at La Robraye in Poitou. He is a rascal full of tricks."

"And he says," added Bertrand, "that a company of Rêitres is more than a match for a company of light horsemen. I am as certain of it as that horse there is a roan. I learned it from a page of the Queen."

The audience stirred with anger; but this soon gave way to their curiosity to know against whom the warlike

preparations and precautionary measures they saw going on were being taken.

"Is it true, Sergeant," asked the trumpeter, "that some one tried to kill the King yesterday?"

"I wager it was one of those * * * * heretics."

"The innkeeper at the 'Cross of Saint Andrew,' where we had breakfast," said Bertrand, "told us how they tried to break up the mass."

"In that case we could eat meat every day," said Merlin, very philosophically. "A morsel of half-salted pork instead of a dish of beans! That is nothing to complain about."

"Yes; but if the Huguenots gain authority, the first thing they will want to do will be to disband our companies of light horsemen and put in our places these dogs of German Rêitres."

"If that is true I shall not be shy of skin-slitting as far as they are concerned. *Mort de ma vie!* That makes me a good Catholic! But tell us, Bertrand, since you have served with the Protestants, is it true that the Admiral gave only eight sous to his troopers?"

"Not a dernier more, the old thick-skin! So I left him after the first campaign."

"What an ill-temper the captain is in today," said the trumpeter. "He is generally such a jolly devil and talks freely with the soldiers; but he has not raised his teeth along the entire journey."

"It is the news that causes him chagrin," replied the sergeant.

"What news?"

"Apparently what the Huguenots are planning."

"The civil war will begin again," said Bertrand.

"So much the better for us," said Merlin, who always looked on the cheerful side of things. "Blows will be given, villages will be burned and Huguenot women will be chased."

"It looks as if they were going to try their old Amboise

success again," said the sergeant, "and that is why we were sent for. We shall settle that in good order."

At this moment the cornet returned with his detachment; he approached the captain and spoke to him in a whisper, while the soldiers who had accompanied him now rejoined their comrades.

"By my beard!" said one of those who had gone to reconnoitre, "I do not know what is going on in Paris today. We did not even see a cat in the streets; but, then, we saw the Bastille full of troops; yes! I saw the Swiss spears collect in the courtyard as thick as wheat spikes."

"There must have been more than five hundred," said another.

"This is certain," said the first; "the Huguenots tried to assassinate the King and during the fracas the Admiral was wounded by the great Duke of Guise's own hand."

"Ah! That brigand! The stroke was well aimed!" cried the sergeant.

"Many say," continued the trooper, "that the Swiss were complaining, in their devilish jargon, that the heretics have been put up with too long in France."

"It is true that for some time they have been very haughty," said Merlin.

"Would you not think they had beaten us at Jarneac and Montcontour with their swagger and dash?"

"They wish," said the trumpeter, "to eat the meat and give us only the bones."

"It is high time that good Catholics gave them a rough raking over."

"As for me," said the sergeant, "if the King said to me, 'Kill these knaves for me!' may they strip off my shoulder straps if I would wait for him to say it a second time!"

"But tell us, Belle-Rose, what our cornet has done," said Merlin.

"He talked to some kind of Swiss officer; but I could not understand what he said. It must have been some-

thing curious, for he cried out every moment or so: *'Ah, mon Dieu! 'Ah mon Dieu!'"*

"Look! There are horsemen galloping at top speed towards us; no doubt they bring us orders."

"I think there are only two, and the captain and the cornet are going to meet them."

Two horsemen were riding rapidly toward the light horse troop. One, richly dressed and wearing a plumed hat and a green scarf, rode on a war-horse. His companion was a fat man, short and thick set; he was dressed in a black robe and carried a huge woden crucifix.

"I see a battle ahead certainly!" said the sergeant. "There is the almoner they have sent to confess the wounded."

"It is not very agreeable to fight without having dined," muttered Merlin in a low voice.

The two horsemen then slackened the speed of their horses, so that on joining the captain they halted them without effort.

"I kiss Monsieur de Mergy's hands," said the man in a green scarf. "Does he recognize his servant, Thomas de Maurevel?"

The captain was ignorant as yet of Maurevel's newest crime; he knew him only as the assassin of the brave Mouy. He said very curtly:

"I do not know Monsieur de Maurevel. I suppose you have finally come to tell us why we are here?"

"The idea, monsieur, is to save our good King and our holy religion from the peril which menaces them."

"What is that peril?" asked George in a scornful voice.

"The Huguenots have conspired against His Majesty; but their guilty plans have been discovered in time by the grace of God, and all good Christians have decided to band together tonight and exterminate them during their sleep."

"As the Midianites were exterminated by Gideon the Great," said the man in the black robe.

"What is this I hear?" cried Mergy, shuddering with horror.

"The citizens are armed," continued Maurevel; "the Gardes Françaises and three thousand Swiss are in the city. We have about sixty thousand men on our side; at eleven o'clock the signal will be given and the brawl will begin."

"Miserable cut-throat! What infamy are you plotting? The King does not order assassinations—at the most, he pays for them."

But as he spoke George recalled the strange conversation he had several days before with the King.

"No violence, Monsieur Captain; if the services of the King did not claim all my attention I should reply to your insults. Listen to me: I come in behalf of His Majesty to request you to follow me with your troop. We have been assigned the Rue Saint Antoine and the neighboring quarter. I bring you an exact list of the persons you must dispatch. The Reverend Father Malebouche will exhort your people and distribute white crosses among them, such as all Catholics will wear, so that in the darkness the faithful will not be mistaken for heretics."

"And I am to consent to lend a hand in the massacre of sleeping people!"

"Are you a Catholic and do you acknowledge Charles IX as your King? Do you know the signature of Marshal de Retz, to whom you owe obedience?" And he handed him a paper which he had in his belt.

Mergy summoned a trooper and by the light of a straw torch, kindled from an arquebus fuse, read the order, which was in correct form, enjoining upon Captain de Mergy, in behalf of the King, to support the citizen guard with armed force, and to obey orders from Monsieur de Maurevel for a purpose which the latter would explain to him. To this order wat attached a long row of names with the heading: *List of Heretics to be put to death in the quarter of Saint Antoine.* The light of the torch burning in the trooper's hand showed to all the cavalry

the profound emotion which this order, as yet unknown to them, produced on their leader.

"My troopers will never do the work of assassins!" said George, and threw the paper into Maurevel's face.

"This is not a question of assassination," said the priest, coldly; "it concerns heretics, and it is justice that is going to be meted out to them."

"Brave men!" cried Maurevel, raising his voice and addressing himself to the light horse troop. "The Huguenots plan the assassination of the King and the Catholics; we must anticipate them: tonight we shall kill them all as they sleep—and the King accords you the privilege of their houses."

A yell of ferocious joy ran along the ranks: "Long live the King! Death to the Huguenots!"

"Silence in the ranks!" cried the captain in a voice of thunder. "I alone have the right to give orders to these troopers. Comrades, what this wretch said cannot be true, and if the King ordered it himself my troopers would never kill defenseless men."

The soldiers remained silent.

"Long live the King! Death to the Huguenots!" cried Maurevel and his companion at the same time. And an instant after them the horsemen repeated: "Long live the King! Death to the Huguenots!"

"Good! Captain, will you obey?" said Maurevel.

"I am no longer captain!" cried George. And he tore off his collar and scarf—insignias of his rank.

"Seize the traitor!" shouted Maurevel, and drew his sword; "kill the rebel who disobeys his King!"

But not a soldier dared to lift his hand against his chief. George struck Maurevel's sword out of his hand. but instead of stabbing him with his own he contented himself with striking him so violently in the face with the hilt of his sword that he fell off his horse.

"Cowards, farewell! I thought I was in command of soldiers, but you are only assassins." Then, turning to

his cornet: "Alphonse, if you want to be captain, here is a great chance. Put yourself at the head of these brigands."

With these words he set spurs to his horse and galloped away toward the center of the city. The cornet followed him for a few paces, but soon slackened his horse's gait, then fell into a walk and at last halted, wheeled around and rejoined the troop, no doubt reflecting that the captain's advice, though given in a moment of wrath, was none the less good to follow.

Maurevel, still dazed by the blow he had received, remounted, blaspheming, and the monk, lifting his crucifix, exhorted the soldiers not to give quarter to a single Huguenot, but to drown heresy in torrents of blood.

The soldiers were staggered a moment by their captain's reproaches; but relieved of his presence, and having before their eyes the prospect of great plunder, they brandished their swords over their heads and swore to execute all Maurevel's commands.

CHAPTER XXI.

A LAST ATTEMPT.

Soothsayer: Beware the Ides of March!
SHAKESPEARE, *Julius Caesar.*

That same evening at the usual hour Mergy left his house closely wrapped in a stone-colored mantle, and with his hat pulled down over his eyes he made his way with due discretion toward the home of the Countess. He had walked but a few steps when he met the surgeon, Ambrose Paré, whom he recognized as the one who attended him when wounded. Paré was evidently returning from the Hôtel de Châtillon, and Mergy, after making himself known, asked him the news of the Admiral.

"He is better," said the surgeon. "The wound improves and the malady diminishes. With God's aid he will recover. I hope the potion I prescribed for him for this evening will be salutary and that he will pass a tranquil night."

A man of the lower classes who walked by heard them mention the Admiral's name. As soon as he was far enough off not to be afraid of having his insolence punished, he cried:

"He soon will be dancing the saraband to Montfaucon, this Devil of an Admiral of yours!" And then he took to his heels.

"Miserable *canaille!*" said Mergy. "I am sorry that our great Admiral is obliged to remain in a city filled with men who are his enemies."

"Luckily his hôtel is well guarded," replied the surgeon. "When I left him the staircase was filled with soldiers who had their fuses lighted. Ah, Monsieur de Mergy, these town-folk do not love us. But it is growing late and I must return to the Louvre."

They parted, and Mergy went on his way absorbed in rose-colored thoughts that soon made him forget the good

health of the Admiral and his hatred for Papists. He could not, however, help noticing an extraordinary amount of stirring about the streets which were less frequented than usual after nightfall. Sometimes he met men bearing odd-looking burdens on their shoulders that he took in the dusk to be bundles of pikes; then came a detachment of soldiers marching in silence, their arms shouldered and their fuses lighted; windows were opened precipitately; figures appeared at them for a moment with lights and then disappeared immediately thereafter.

"Halloo!" he cried to a porter. "Good man, where are you going so fast with those weapons?"

"To the Louvre, sir, to the entertainment this evening."

"Comrade," said Mergy to a sergeant commanding a platoon, "where are you going all in arms?"

"To the Louvre, sir; to the entertainment this evening."

"Halloo! Master Page, do you not belong to the King? Where are you and your friends taking those horses harnessed for battle?"

"To the Louvre, sir; to the entertainment this evening."

"The entertainment this evening!" said Mergy to himself. "It seems that everybody in the world is going to this entertainment except me. However, it is of no importance; the King can amuse himself without me and I have little curiosity to see his entertainment."

Slightly further on he noticed a meanly-clad man stopping in front of several houses marking white crosses on their doors with chalk.

"Good fellow, are you a billetmaster that you thus mark all the houses?"

The unknown man passed on without answering.

At the bend of a street on which the Countess lived he nearly ran against a man wrapped like himself in a large mantle who was turning the same corner in the opposite direction. In spite of the darkness, and anxious as both appeared to remain incognito, they recognized each other at once.

"Ah! Good evening, Monsieur de Béville," said Mergy, holding out his hand.

In order to give him his right hand, Béville made a singular movement under his cloak; he shifted something heavy that he was carrying from his right hand to his left, and as he did so his mantle bulged out a bit.

"Hail to the valiant champion of beautiful women!" cried Béville. "I wager my noble friend has had a run of good fortune."

"And you, Monsieur?—it would seem that there were some jealous husbands in your neighborhood, for if I am not mistaken that is a coat of mail on your shoulders and what you hold under your mantle looks very like a brace of pistols."

"One must be prudent, Monsieur Bernard, very prudent," said Béville. As he spoke the words he cautiously arranged his mantle so as to hide the weapons he was carrying.

"To my infinite regret I cannot offer you my services and my sword to keep the street clear or stand sentinel before the door of your mistress. Tonight it is impossible, but another time I may be at your disposal."

"You could not go with me this evening at any rate, Monsieur de Mergy." He accompanied these few words with a strange smile.

"Well, good luck! Adieu!"

"I also wish you good luck;" he placed a peculiar emphasis upon his farewell.

They parted, and Mergy had gone but a few steps when he heard Béville call him. He turned and saw him returning also.

"Is your brother in Paris?"

"No, but I expect him any day. By the way, tell me, are you going to the entertainment tonight?"

"The entertainment?"

"Yes; they tell me there is going to be a great entertainment at the Court tonight."

Béville muttered a few low words between his teeth.

"Adieu once more," said Mergy. "I am in a bit of a hurry, and—you understand me?"

"Stop, stop; just a word. I cannot let you go without a word of counsel from a good friend."

"What counsel?"

"Do not go to her tonight. Believe me, you will thank me tomorrow."

"Is that your advice? Then I do not understand you. Who is she?"

"Bah! You know whom I mean. But if you are wise you will cross the Seine tonight."

"Is this the pleasantry you were leading up to all the time?"

"Not at all. I was never speaking more seriously. Cross the Seine, I tell you. If the Devil drives you too hard, go to the Rue Saint Jacques, near the Jacobin Convent. Two doors off from that good Father's you will see a large crucifix of wood nailed against a mean dwelling. It is a droll sign—but never mind! Knock and you will find a very obliging woman who will receive you well out of consideration for me. Go and have your pleasure on the other side of the Seine. Mother Brûlard has several pretty and well-bred nieces. Do you understand me?"

"You are really too good. I kiss your hands."

"No, seriously; follow the advice I give you. On my word as a gentleman! You will find yourself the better for it."

"A thousand thanks; I shall avail myself of it some other time. Tonight I am expected." And Mergy started to go.

"Cross the Seine tonight, *mon brave;* that is my last word. If you come to harm by neglecting my advice I wash my hands of the matter.

There was an unusual seriousness in Béville's tone of voice which struck Mergy. Béville was turning to leave and this time it was Mergy who detained him.

"What the Devil do you mean? Explain yourself, Monsieur de Béville, and do not talk in enigmas."

"My dear fellow, I have already perhaps spoken more

clearly than I should; but cross the river before midnight, and—adieu."

"But——"

Béville was already far off. Mergy thought to follow him for a moment, but soon ashamed of wasting time that might be so much better employed, he retraced his steps and approached the garden he was to enter. He was obliged to promenade for some time to allow certain passers-by a chance to disappear. He feared that they might be somewhat suspicious on seeing him enter a garden gate at such an hour. The night was beautiful; a gentle breeze had tempered the heat, and the moon disappeared under and emerged from faint white clouds. It was a night made for love.

Then the street was deserted for a moment; he immediately opened the garden gate and closed it after him noiselessly. His heart beat fast, but he thought only of the pleasure awaiting him with Diane, and all the sinister thoughts which Béville's strange words had awakened in him were soon far distant.

He approached the house on tip-toe. A lantern burned brightly behind a red hanging draped over a half-opened window; it was the appointed signal. In the twinkling of an eye he was in the oratory of his mistress.

She was half reclining on a very low lounge covered with deep blue damask. Her dark and disheveled hair covered the cushion upon which her head rested. Her eyes were closed, but she seemed to keep them shut with some effort. A single lantern of silver suspended from the ceiling shed its rays upon the pale figure and fire-red lips of Diane de Turgis. She was not asleep, but one would have said from her appearance that she was tormented by a dreadful dream. At the first sound from Mergy's boots she raised her head, opened her eyes and mouth, shuddering, and scarcely stifled a cry of fright.

"Did I frighten you, my angel?" said Mergy, kneeling before her and stooping over the cushion where the beautiful Countess had let her head fall back.

"You are here at last! God be praised!"

"Am I so late? It is not yet near midnight."

"Ah! Do not touch me. Bernard—did anyone see you enter?"

"No one—But what is the matter, my love? Why do those pretty little lips avoid mine?"

"Oh! Bernard, if you only knew—Oh! Do not torment me, I pray you—I suffer horribly, I have a dreadful migraine—my poor head is on fire."

"Pauvre amie!"

"Sit down close to me—and, I pray you, do not ask me anything tonight—I am very ill." She hid her lovely face in one of the lounge cushions and uttered a moan of anguish. Then all at once she raised herself on her elbows, shook aside the luxuriant hair that covered her, and, grasping Mergy's hand, placed it on her temple. He felt the violent throbbing of the artery.

"Your hand is cold, it does me good," she said.

"My dear Diane! How I wish I could have the migraine in your place!" he said, kissing her warm forehead.

"Ah! Yes—and I wish—— But place the tips of your fingers on my eyelids, that will soothe me—I think if I could weep I would suffer less; but I cannot shed a tear."

There was a long silence, interrupted only by the difficult and irregular breathing of the Countess. Mergy, kneeling by the couch, gently stroked and sometimes kissed the closed eyelids of beautiful Diane. His left hand rested on the pillow and the fingers of his mistress, enclosed in his hand, clutched his fingers from time to time with a convulsive movement. Diane's sweet and burning breath touched the lips of Mergy with a voluptuous caress.

"Dearest friend," he said at last, "to me you seem to suffer from something worse than a headache. Has anything grieved you? And why do you not tell me what it is? Do you not know, if we love one another, that love makes us share our pains as well as our pleasures?"

The Countess shook her head but did not open her

eyes. Her lips moved but did not speak; then, as if exhausted by the effort, she let her head sink upon Mergy's shoulder. At that moment the clock struck half-past eleven. Diane started and sat up, trembling.

"But, my beautiful, truly you frighten me."

"Nothing—nothing yet," she said in a hushed voice; "the sound of that clock is hideous! At each stroke I feel as if red iron were piercing my head."

Mergy could think of no better remedy or reply than to kiss her forehead as she leaned toward him. Suddenly she stretched out her hands and, placing them on her lover's shoulders and still half reclining, she stared at him with a look so penetrating that it seemed to go through him.

"Bernard," she said, "when are you going to be converted?"

"My dearest, let us not speak of that tonight; it will only make you worse."

"It is your stubborness that makes me ill—but that matters little to you. Besides, time presses, and if I were dying I would gladly spend my last breath in exhorting you."

Mergy attempted to seal her mouth with a kiss. This is a very good argument and one that serves as a reply to every question asked a lover by his mistress. But Diane, who, as a rule, met him half way, repulsed him this time with force and almost indignation.

"Hear me, Monsieur de Mergy; every day I shed tears of blood thinking of you and your error. You know I love you! Judge what I endure when I think that he who is far dearer to me than life may perhaps at any moment perish body and soul."

"Diane, you know that we agreed never to talk about such matters again."

"We must, unhappy man! How do you know that you have even an hour in which to repent?"

The extraordinary tone of her voice and the bizarre expression reminded Mergy involuntarily of the strange

advice he had just received from Béville. He could not help feeling the emotion but he controlled himself and attributed the zeal to a redoubled religious fervor.

"What do you mean, beautiful? Do you think the ceiling, in order to kill a Huguenot, will fall on his head as the canopy of your couch did yesterday? It was fortunate we escaped at the expense of getting a little dusty.

"Your obstinacy makes me despair! Listen, I dreamed that your enemies are ready to kill you now—I saw you torn and bleeding in their hands, giving up your soul before I can bring a confessor to you."

"My enemies? I did not know I had any."

"Madman! Are not all who detest heresy your enemies? Is not that all of France? Yes, all Frenchmen must be your foes so long as you are an enemy to God and the Church."

"Let that rest, my queen. As for your dreams, la Camilla will give you an explanation; I have no skill at that. But let us speak of other things. You were at Court today, I think; it must have been there that you acquired this headache which troubles you and maddens me."

"Yes, Bernard; I was at Court. I have seen the Queen and I left her—determined to make a last effort to change you. You must, you must, absolutely——!"

"It seems to me," interrupted Bernard, "it seems to me that, *ma belle amie,* since you are strong enough to preach with such vehemence in spite of your illness, we might, if you permitted it, we really might employ our time better."

She met this raillery with a look of mixed disdain and anger.

"Reprobate!" she said in a low voice, as if speaking to herself, "why am I so weak with him? But," she continued out loud, "I see clearly enough that you do not love me and esteem me no more than your horse. Provided I give you pleasure it matters little if I suffer! It is for you, and for you alone, that I suffer the torments of my

conscience, beside which all the tortures of man's invention and hatred are nothing. A single word from your lips would restore peace to my soul, but that word you will not speak! You will not sacrifice a single one of your prejudices for me."

"What persecution you make me endure, my dear Diane! Be just and do not let your zeal for your religion blind you. Answer me—will you ever find a slave more docile than I in all that body and soul can do for you? But if I must say it again: I can die for you, but I cannot believe in certain things for you."

She shrugged her shoulders as he spoke, and looked at him with an expression of almost hatred.

"I cannot," he continued, "change my hair from brown to blond for you. I cannot alter my shape at your pleasure. My religion is a part of me, *chère amie* and something which can be taken from me only with my life. They might preach at me for twenty years and never make me believe that a morsel of unleavened bread——"

"Silence!" she interrupted with a tone of authority; "no blasphemies! I have tried everything to no effect. All of you infected with the poison of heresy are a people with hardened heads and you shut your ears to the truth; you fear to hear and see it. Good. The time has come when you shall no longer hear and see. There was but one means left to destroy this canker in the Church and that means they will use."

She paced the room several times with an agitated expression and then presently continued:

"Within an hour they will sever the seven heads of the Dragon of Heresy. The sword is sharpened, the faithful are prepared. The impious shall be swept from the face of the earth!"

Then, pointing her finger at the clock in the corner of the room:

"See!" she said, "you have a quarter of an hour for repentance. When that hand reaches the top your fate will be sealed!"

She was still speaking when a dull sound, like that of a crowd collecting about a vast fire, began to make itself heard, at first indistinctly, then it seemed to grow rapidly, and after a few minutes one heard the chiming of bells together with the report of firearms in the distance.

"What horrors are these you announce?" cried Mergy.

The Countess had rushed to the window and opened it.

Then the noise, no longer muffled by the glass and curtains, came in distinctly. One seemed to distinguish in it shrieks of distress and shouts of joy. A scarlet smoke rose to the sky and hung over every part of the city as far as one could see. One might have thought it a vast conflagration had not the odor of rosin, produced only by thousands of lighted torches, immediately filled the chamber. At the same time the flash of an arquebus evidently discharged down the street lit up for an instant the windows of the adjoining house.

"The massacre has begun!" cried the Countess, putting her hands in horror to her head.

"What massacre? What do you mean?"

"Tonight they will kill all Huguenots; the King has ordered it. All Catholics have taken up arms and not a heretic is to be spared. The Church and France are saved, but you are lost if you do not abjure your false belief."

Mergy felt a great chill course throughout his entire body. He stared with haggard eyes at Diane de Turgis, whose features expressed a singular mixture of anguish and triumph. The hideous noise which echoed in his ears and filled the entire city proclaimed sufficiently the truth of the frightful news he had just heard. For several minutes the Countess remained motionless, her eyes fixed on him, without speaking; her finger pointed to the window; and she appeared to wish to arouse in Mergy's imagination bloody scenes resembling a cannibal feast, which the yelling and torchlights suggested. By degrees her expression softened; its savage joy vanished; the terror alone remained. At last, falling on her knees and in an imploring voice:

"Bernard!" she cried, "I conjure you, save your life! Be converted. Save your life and thus save mine, which depends upon it."

Mergy glared fiercely at her. She was still on her knees and with outstretched arms. Not answering a word he rushed to the end of the oratory and seized his sword, which upon his entrance he had placed on a chair.

"Miserable man! What are you going to do?" cried the Countess, hastening to him.

"Defend myself! They shall not kill me like a sheep!"

"Madman that you are! A thousand swords could not save you. The entire city is in arms. The King's guards, the Swiss, the citizens, the mob—all are taking part in the massacre; and every Huguenot at this moment has a dozen daggers at his breast. There is only one means of rescue from death; become a Catholic!"

Mergy was a brave man but, thinking of the dangers which the night seemed to promise, for a moment he felt a base fear at the bottom of his heart, and even the notion of saving himself by apostasy flashed through his mind with the rapidity of lightning.

"I can answer for your life if you become a Catholic!" said Diane, clasping her hands.

"If I abjure," thought he, "I shall despise myself for the rest of my life." The thought restored his courage which was redoubled by shame at his momentary weakness. He crushed his hat down on his head, buckled his belt and, wrapping his mantle about his left arm like a shield, he started resolutely to the door.

"Where are you going, wretch?"

"Into the street. I do not want you to have the grief of seeing me murdered before your eyes and in your house."

There was a tone of such profound contempt in his voice that the Countess was overwhelmed by it. She threw herself in his way. He roughly repulsed her. But she grasped the end of his doublet and followed behind him on her knees.

"Let me go!" he cried. "Do you wish to deliver me yourself to the daggers of the assassins? The mistress of a Huguenot can purge her soul by sacrificing her lover's blood to her God!"

"Stay, Bernard, I implore you! It is not only your soul's health I desire. Live for me dearest! Save yourself in the name of our love—consent to say a single word and I swear you are saved!"

"What? I accept the faith of assassins and bandits! Holy martyrs of the Gospel—I come!"

And he tore himself so impetuously from her that the Countess fell quickly to the floor He had opened the door to leave when Diane, rising with the agility of a young tigress, rushed at him and clasped him in her arms with the grip stronger than that of a powerful man.

"Bernard!" she cried beside herself and with tears in her eyes, "I love you more than if you had become a Catholic!" and she drew him to the couch, flung him upon it and covered him with kisses and tears.

"Rest here my only love! Rest with me, my brave Bernard," she said, pressing him closely to her like a serpent enlacing its prey. "They will not look for you here in my arms, and if they did, they must kill me to reach you! Pardon, dear love! I could not warn you sooner of the danger menacing you; I was bound by a terrible oath. But I will save you or perish with you!"

At that moment some one knocked rudely at the street door. The Countess gave a piercing cry, Mergy with his mantle still wrapped about his arm left her embrace and felt so strong and resolute that he would have rushed headlong into a band of a hundred assassins without hesitation if they had appeared before him.

At the entrance gate of almost every Parisian house there was a small wicket with closely meshed grill-work so that the inmates of the house could reconnoitre in advance to see if it was safe for them to open. Sometimes even massive oak doors, strengthened with nails and bands of iron, were not enough to reassure cautious

people who did not want to surrender without a regular siege. Narrow loopholes were therefore worked into both sides of the door and from these they could easily shoot their assailants without being seen.

An old confidential equerry of the Countess, after inspecting the person who presented himself through some such grill-work, and after sufficiently questioning him, came back and told his mistress that Captain George de Mergy demanded instant admittance. Their fears were dispelled and the gate was opened.

CHAPTER XXII

THE TWENTY-FOURTH OF AUGUST

Saignez! Saignez!—*Mot du Maréchal de Tavannes.*

After he left his troop Captain George hastened home, hoping to find his brother; but he found that he had just gone out, telling the servants that he would be away the entire night. George easily guessed that he was at the home of the Countess and hurried to seek him there. But the massacre had already begun; the tumult, the gangs of assassins and the chains stretched across the middle of the streets arrested him at every step. He was forced to pass by the Louvre, where fanaticism spent all its fury. A great number of Protestants lived in that quarter now invaded by Papist citizens and soldiers of the guard armed with fire and sword. There, according to a contemporary writer,* "blood ran in all directions seeking its way to the river," and it was impossible to pass along the streets without the risk of being crushed at every moment by corpses flung from the windows.

By an infernal precaution most of the boats, which as a rule were moored along the Louvre front, had been taken across the river, so that many of the fugitives who ran to the Seine bank, hoping to embark and escape the blows of their enemies, had no choice but between the water and the halberds of the pursuing soldiers. Meanwhile, from one of the palace windows men saw, it is said, Charles IX, armed with a long arquebus, "potting like game"† the unfortunate passersby.

The captain, striding over the dead bodies and staining himself with their blood, pursued his way exposed at every step to the chance of being the victim of an assassin's mistake. He noticed that every soldier as well

*D'Aubigné; Histoire Universelle.
†D'Aubigné: Histoire Universelle.

as every armed citizen wore a white scarf on his arm and a white cross on his hat. He could readily have adopted the sign of recognition, but the horror inspired in him by the assassins extended even to the marks by which they recognized each other.

On the river bank near the Châtelet he heard his name called. He turned his head and saw a man with the sign of the white cross on his hat, armed to the teeth but apparently making no use of his weapons, who twisted a piece of paper between his fingers with an air of complete detachment. It was Béville. He looked calmly at the bodies, both dead and living, which were being flung into the Seine from the Pont au Meunier.

"What the Devil are you doing here, George? Is it a miracle or a special grace which strengthens you with this great zeal? Because you look as if you had joined the hunt after the Huguenots."

"And what are you doing among these miserable beings yourself?"

"I? I am looking on. *Parbleau!* It is a sight. And do you want to know a good trick I have played? Remember old Michael Cornabon the Huguenot moneylender who stripped me?"

"Have you killed him? Wretch!"

"I? Fie on you! I never meddle in religious affairs. Instead of killing him I hid him in my cellar and he has given me the receipt in full for all I owe him. So I have done both a good deed and have been rewarded for it. It is true that in order to facilitate his signing I had to put a pistol twice to his head; but, the Devil take me, if I meant to pull the trigger—Ah! Now: look at that woman who is caught by the skirt on one of the bridge beams. She will fall—no she will not!—*Peste!* That is curious, it deserves closer inspection."

George left, and as he did so he struck his forehead with his hand, saying:

"And this is one of the most honest gentlemen I know in this city tonight!

He now turned into the Rue Saint-Josse, which was deserted and dark; clearly none of the dwellers there were of the Reformed Faith. Yet the tumult from the neighboring streets was heard quite distinctly. Suddenly the white walls were lit up by the red glare of torches. He heard piercing cries and saw a half-naked woman with her hair down and holding a child in her arms. She ran with more than human speed. Two men pursued her and animated each other with savage yells like hunters chasing a wild beast. The woman was just about to run into an open passage when one of her pursuers armed with an arquebus fired at her. The shot hit her in the back and brought her down. She rose quickly, made one step toward George and again fell to her knees; then with a last effort she lifted her child to the captain as if relying on his generosity. She died without saying a word.

"Another heretic slut brought down!" cried the marksman; "I will not rest until I have made up the dozen!"

"Wretch!" yelled the captain, and fired his pistol point-blank at him.

The scoundrel's head struck the wall opposite. His eyes gave a terrified glare and slipping on his heels he fell stone dead on the ground like a beam whose props have given way.

"What! Kill a Catholic!" cried his comrade in crime, who held a torch in one hand and a bloody sword in the other. "Who, then, are you? By the Mass! But you are one of the King's light horsemen! *Mordieu!* You have made a mistake, officer."

The captain drew his second pistol from his belt and cocked it.

This move and the click of the trigger were understood perfectly. The assassin threw down his torch and fled at top speed. George did not deign to fire after him. He bent over, looked at the woman stretched out on the ground and saw she was dead. The ball had penetrated her through and through, her child, whose arms were

around her neck, wailed and wept; he was covered with blood, but by a miracle had escaped being wounded. The captain had some difficulty in tearing him from his mother, to whom the child clung with all its strength. Then he wrapped him in his own mantle; and made cautious by the recent encounter, he took up the dead man's hat, tore off the white cross and placed it on his own. In this manner he made his way without further hinderance to the house of the Countess.

The two brothers rushed into each other's arms and for a while remained speechless. The captain then described the condition of the city in a few words. Bernard cursed the King, the Guises and the priests; he determined to go out and join his brothers that they might somewhere take a stand against their enemies. The Countess held him back weeping, while the child cried for its mother.

After much time spent in exclamations, sighs and tears, they finally thought to make plans. As for the child, the Countess' equerry undertook the matter of finding a woman to care for him. Mergy could not leave at such a moment. Also, where was he to go? And did any one know if the massacre was spreading through France? Numerous guardsmen occupied the bridges over which the Protestants might pass to the Faubourg Saint Germain and thence easily escape from the city, gaining the southern provinces, always sympathetic to their cause. On the other hand, to implore the King's mercy at a moment when, in the heat of the carnage, he thought of nothing but fresh victims, seemed both useless and imprudent. The Countess' house, because of her reputation for piety, was not exposed to serious search by the murderers, and Diane thought she could depend upon her servants. Mergy was not able to think of a retreat where he ran less risk. He decided to hide himself there and see what would happen.

The daylight, far from stopping the massacres, seemed only to increase them and make them more systematic.

There was not a Catholic who, under penalty of being suspected of heresy, did not display the white cross and either take up arms or denounce such Huguenots as were still living. In the meanwhile the King shut himself up in his palace, giving audience to none but the chiefs of the murderers. The populace, induced by the chance of pillage, joined the train bands and the soldiers, while the priests in the churches exhorted the faithful to redouble their cruelty.

"Let us," they said, "crush the hydra's head at once and put an end to civil war forever."

And to persuade the bloodthirsty and miracle-craving mob that Heaven approved of its fury and encouraged it by a significant omen:

"Go to the Cemetery of the Innocents," they cried; "go and see the hawthorne blossom again a second time, new and rejuvenated as if watered with heretic blood!"

Numerous processions of armed murderers marched with great ceremony to worship the holy trees, and left the cemetery flushed with fresh zeal to discover and put to death those whom Heaven thus manifestly damned. A saying of Catherine was in every mouth; it was repeated by those who slaughtered the children and women: *Che pieta lor ser crudele, che crudele lor ser piesto.* (To-day it is merciful to be cruel and cruel to be merciful.")

Strangest of all! Among all these Protestants there were few who had not taken part in desperate battles where they often successfully made valor atone for lack of numbers, and yet during this butchery two alone made any resistance to their assassins, and only one of these men was a soldier. Perhaps their habit of fighting in groups and in regular formation deprived them of individual enterprise which might have prompted each Protestant to defend himself in his house as in a fortress. One saw old warriors holding their throats up like sacrificial victims to rascals who would have trembled before

them a day previous. They exchanged resignation for courage and preferred the glory of martyrdom to that of a soldier.

When the thirst for blood was quenched, one noted the most clement of the assassins offer life to their victims at the price of abjuration. A very small number of Calvinists took advantage of the offer and consented to ransom from death and torture by a falsehood perhaps excusable. Women and children repeated their creed with drawn swords at their heads and died without giving a murmur.

After two days the King tried to put an end to this slaughter, but when one once relaxes the reins of mob passions it is impossible to check them. Not only did the daggers not cease to stab, but, accused of unorthodox compassion, the King himself was obliged to revoke his suggestion of clemency and even exaggerate the malevolence which at all times was one of the principal traits of his character.

During the first few days after Saint Bartholomew's Eve, Mergy was visited regularly in his hiding place by his brother, who every time told him fresh details of the revolting scenes of which he was a witness.

"Ah! When shall I be able to quit this land of murder and crime?" cried George. "I would rather live among wild beasts than Frenchmen."

"Come to La Rochelle with me," said Mergy; "I hope the assassins are not there yet. Come, die with me and efface your apostasy by defending the last stronghold of our religion."

"Ah! What shall become of me?" said Diane.

"Then Germany, rather, or England," replied George. "There at least we need not be murdered nor murderers."

These plans were not carried out. George was thrown into prison for disobedience to the King's orders, and the Countess, trembling lest her lover be discovered, dreamed only of a way to get him out of Paris.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE TWO MONKS

Lui mettant un Capuchon,
Ils en firent un moine.

Chanson Populaire.

In a cabaret on the banks of the Loire River, a short distance from Orleans as one goes down toward Beaugency, a young monk in a brown robe with a large hood half drawn over his face was seated before a table, his eyes fixed on a breviary with the most edifying attention, although he chose a corner that was a little dark for reading. At his girdle he had a rosary whose beads were a little larger than pigeon's eggs and an ample supply of medals with effigies of saints hung from the same girdle jingling at every move he made. When he lifted his head to look toward the side of the door one could see a well-formed mouth adorned with a mustache curled like a Turkish bow and modish enough to have done honor to a captain of gendarmes. His hands were very white, his nails long and carefully trimmed, and nothing announced the fact that the young brother, in spite of the rules of his order, ever handled a spade or rake.

A stout, tubby peasant woman, who combined the duties of servant and cook in the cabaret of which she was the proprietress, approached the monk with an awkward courtesy and said to him:

"Well then! Father, are you going to order something for your dinner? It is past noon-day, do you know that?"

"Will it be long before the Beaugency Ferry is here?"

"Who knows? The water is low and they cannot choose their own time. Besides, it is not yet the hour. If I were in your place I should dine here."

"Good! I shall dine; but have you no other room than this to eat in? I smell an odor here that is disagreeable."

"You are very sensitive, Father. As for me, I cannot smell anything at all."

"Is some one singeing pigs close to the inn?"

"Pigs? Ha! That is droll! Pigs? Yes; something like that; they are as good as pigs, for, as the saying goes, they were dressed in silk when they were living (in French *soie* means both silk and pig's bristles), but these pigs are not good to eat. These are Huguenots, Reverend Father, whom they burn by the water's edge a hundred yards away; and it is their odor that you smell."

"Huguenots!"

"Yes, Huguenots. Do you mind that? It need not take away your appetite. And as for changing your dining room, I have no other; so you are obliged to be content with this. Bah! The Huguenot odor is not so bad! Besides, if they were not burned they might smell worse. There was a pile of them on the river bank this morning—yes! As high as that chimney place."

"And you went to look at these corpses?"

"You mean because they were naked? Dead men do not count, Holy Father; they affected me no more than if I had seen a pile of dead frogs. All the same, they must have done a good day's work at Orleans yesterday, for the Loire has brought us these heretic fish in abundance; and as the water is low, they are found dry on the sand every day. Just yesterday as the miller's boy looked to see how many tench were in his net he found a dead woman in it with a halberd wound through the middle. Listen, it went in right here and came out between her shoulders. Even so he would much rather have found a fine carp——But what is the matter with your Reverence? Are you going to fall into a faint? Shall I give you a sip of Beaugency wine while you wait for your dinner? That will put heart into you."

"I thank you, no."

"Good! Now what will you have for dinner?"

"The first thing you touch—it is of little importance."

"But what? I have a larder that is well supplied, I can tell you."

"Good! Then give me a pullet and let me read my breviary."

"A pullet! Your Reverence, a pullet! Well! That is good. The spiders do not spin webs over your teeth on fast days. Have you a dispensation from the Pope to eat pullets on Friday?"

"Ah! I am so absent minded!—Yes, undoubtedly today is Friday—'On Friday thou shalt not eat flesh!'—Give me some eggs. I thank you very much for reminding me in time to prevent so great a sin."

"Now see here!" said the hostess in an undertone, "if you do not remind them, these messieurs will eat pullets on a fast day and yet they make a noise to turn your blood cold if they find a wretched morsel of bacon in a poor woman's soup!" After she said this she then began to cook the eggs, while the monk returned to read his breviary.

"Ave Maria! My sister," said another monk who entered the tavern at the same moment that Dame Marguerite was taking up the handle of the frying pan and was about to turn a gigantic omelet.

The newcomer who entered was a handsome old man, gray bearded, tall, well built and stout; his face was very red; but what attracted attention most was an enormous patch hiding one eye and half covering his cheek. He spoke French easily but with a strong foreign accent.

The moment he entered the younger monk drew his hood still lower so that his face could not be seen, and what surprised Dame Marguerite even more was that the last comer, who had thrown back his cowl because of the heat, pulled it down again so soon as he saw his brother in orders.

"My faith! Father," said the hostess, "you have come just in time for dinner. You will not have to wait, for you will find yourself in the land of friends." Then addressing the younger monk: "Your Reverence, you

will be delighted, will you not, to dine with his Reverence here? The odor of my omelet has attracted him. By our Lady! It is no wonder, because I do not spare butter!"

The young monk replied shyly and stammering.

"I am afraid I shall disturb Monsieur."

The elder, bowing his head still lower, answered:

"I am a poor monk from Alsace—I speak French badly—and fear my company will not be agreeable to my brother."

"Come! Come!" cried Dame Marguerite, "do not be so polite! Between monks of the same order there should be but one board and bed." And she placed a stool at the table just opposite the young monk. The elder, evidently much embarrassed, seated himself upon it sidewise; he seemed to struggle between the desire to eat and a certain repugnance to sitting face to face with his colleague.

The omelet was then served.

"Come, Fathers, be quick with your *benedicite* and tell me if you think my omelet is good."

At the mere word *benedicite* the two monks seemed still less at ease. The younger said to the elder:

"That is for you to say; you are my senior and the honor is yours."

"No, not at all. You were here before I was; it is for you to say it."

"No, I pray you."

"I certainly shall not."

"You must, absolutely."

"Just look at them," said Dame Marguerite; "they will let my omelet get cold! Did anyone ever see two children of Saint Francis so ceremonious? Let the old one give the benediction and the young one say grace afterwards."

"I can only say the benediction in my own tongue," said the old monk. The younger looked much surprised and stole a glance at his companion. However, he joined his hands most devoutly and began to mutter certain

words under his hood which were without any meaning. He then sat down without speaking, devoured three parts of the omelet and drained the bottle placed before him. His comrade, with his nose in his plate, never opened his mouth except to eat. When the omelet was finished he rose, joined his hands and muttered, very hastily, certain Latin words of which the last were *et beata viscera virginis Mariae.* These were the only words that Marguerite heard.

"With all due respect, what a droll grace you said just now, Father! It is not like those our curé says."

"That is the grace said in our convent," said the young Franciscan.

"Will the ferryboat come soon?" said the elder monk.

"Patience!" answered Dame Marguerite; "it will arrive presently."

The younger monk seemed vexed as far as could be judged by a jerk of his head. However, he did not make the slightest comment, and taking up his breviary he began reading it with increased attention.

For his part, the Alsatian turned his back on his companion, beginning to run the beads of his rosary between his index finger and thumb, moving his lips but without uttering the slightest sound.

"Here are the strangest, most silent monks I ever saw," thought Dame Marguerite, sitting down beside her wheel, which she presently started to turn.

For a full hour no sound except the whirring of the spinning wheel interrupted the silence, when four ill-looking men, well armed, entered the inn. They touched the brims of their hats on seeing the two monks, and one of them spoke to Marguerite familiarly as "my little Margot," asking her to give them wine at once and dinner soon.

"For," he said, "it is so long since my jaws were in motion that the moss is growing down my throat."

"Wine! Wine!" grumbled Marguerite; "that is easily said, Monsieur Bois-Dauphin. But are you going to pay

the score? You know Jerome Credit is dead; and besides you already owe me six crowns and more for wine, dinners and suppers, that is the truth as I am an honest woman!"

"One is as true as the other," said Bois-Dauphin, laughing; "that is to say, Mother Margot, I owe you two crowns and not anything over." The words he acutally used were more energetic than these.

"Oh, *Jesu!* Oh Mary! How can you say so?"

"Come, come; no racket, old lady. Six crowns if you wish. I shall pay you, Margot, with our present gain, because I have the gold in my pocket today, although this present profession is a vile one for profit. I cannot think what the rascals do with their money."

"It is highly possible that they swallow it, like the Germans," said one of his comrades.

"Malepeste!" cried Bois-Dauphin, "we must look to that. Good pistoles in a heretic carcass, that is a good joke but not one that should be thrown to the dogs."

"How the minister's daughter shrieked this morning!" said the third.

"And the fat minister also!" added a fourth. "How I did laugh! He was so fat that he would not sink in the water."

"You worked hard this morning?" said Marguerite, coming back from her cellar with her bottles full.

"Fairly hard," said Bois-Dauphin. "Men, women and little children—we made up a dozen in all to throw into the water or into the fire. But, Margot, the worst of it was they did not have a sou; except the women who had some trinkets, the entire bag was not worth four hounds' shoes. Yes, Father," he continued, addressing himself to the younger monk, "we gained plenty of indulgences this morning by killing those heretic dogs, your enemies."

The monk looked at him an instant and then turned back to his reading, but his breviary trembled visibly in his left hand, while his right was clenched like that of a man agitated by an overpowering emotion.

"Apropos of indulgences," said Bois-Dauphin, turning to his comrades, "do you know, I am very anxious to eat some meat today? There are some chickens in the poultry yard which tempt me immensely."

"*Parbleu!*" said one of the scamps, "eat them; we shall not be damned for that. We shall go to confession tomorrow and that settles everything."

"Attention, comrades," said another. "I have thought of a scheme. Ask these fat, frocked men to give us permission to eat meat."

"Yes, as if they could!" said his comrade.

"By Our Lady's Body!" cried Bois-Dauphin, "I know a better scheme than that and I shall whisper it in your ear."

The four scamps put their heads together and Bois-Dauphin in an undertone explained to them his plan, which was greeted with explosions of laughter. Only one of the men seemed to have scruples.

"That is a bad idea you have, Bois-Dauphin, and it may bring us bad luck; as for me, I shall not."

"Hold your tongue, Guillemain! As if it were a tremendous sin to force a man to smell the blade of a dagger."

"Yes, but a tonsure——"

They were speaking in low voices and the two monks seemed to be trying to guess their plots by certain words caught in their conversation.

"Bah! It makes little difference," responded Bois-Dauphin, speaking very loudly. "And besides in this way he will commit the sin and it will not rest on me."

"Yes, yes; Bois-Dauphin is right!" cried the two others.

Bois-Dauphin rose immediately and left the room. A moment later one heard chickens squawking, and the brigand soon appeared holding a dead chicken in each hand.

"Ah! Evil one!" cried Dame Marguerite. "Kill my chickens! And on Friday! What are you going to do with them, ruffian?"

"Silence! Dame Margot, and do not heat my ears; you know I am a bad fellow. Get your spits ready and let me alone." Then, approaching the Alsatian Father: "Now, Father," he said, "you see these two animals? Good! I want you to be so gracious as to baptize them."

The monk recoiled with surprise; the other monk closed his book and Dame Marguerite began to rain insulting language at Bois-Dauphin.

"I baptize them?" said the monk.

"Yes, my Father. I shall be their godfather, Margot here will be godmother. These are the names that I give my godchildren: this shall be called 'Carp' and that 'Perch.' Those are two jolly names."

"Baptize chickens?" cried the monk with a laugh.

"Eh! *Morbleu!* Father, come, set to work!"

"Ah! Scamp!" cried Marguerite, "do you think I shall let you do such things in my house? Do you think you are among Hebrews, or at a witches' Sabbath that you baptize these chickens?"

"Deliver me from this scold!" said Bois-Dauphin to his comrades; "and as for you, my Father, perhaps you could read the name of the cutler who forged this blade?"

As he spoke he placed the naked blade under the nose of the old monk. The younger rose from his bench, but almost instantly, as if after prudent reflection, he sat down again, determined to be patient.

"But, my boy, how am I to baptize poultry?" said the elder.

"*Parbleu!* That is easy; just as you baptize us who are born of woman. Sprinkle a little water on their heads and say: 'I baptize you Carp and you Perch,' only say it in your own jargon. Come, little John, give us that glass of water and, all of you—hats off!—and meditate on Noble God!"

The old Cordelier, to the general surprise, took a little water, sprinkled it on the heads of the chickens and pronounced very rapidly and indistinctly what sounded like a prayer. It ended with "I baptize you Carp and Perch."

He then sat down and fingered his beads with great unconcern as if he had done nothing out of the ordinary.

Dame Marguerite was struck dumb with astonishment. Bois-Dauphin was triumphant. "Come, Margot," he said, throwing the two chickens at her, "cook us this carp and perch; that is a very good dinner for a fast day."

But in spite of the baptism Marguerite still refused to regard them as food for Christians. It was necessary for the bandits to threaten her with rough handling before she decided to spit the improvished fishes.

In the meanwhile Bois-Dauphin and his companions drank deep; they toasted healths and made a loud clatter.

"Listen!" cried Bois-Dauphin, pounding his fist on the table to command silence, "I propose to drink the health of our Holy Father the Pope, and death to all Huguenots; and it is necessary for these frocked individuals, Dame Margot, to drink with us."

The proposal was received with acclamations by his three companions.

He rose, staggering a little, for he was already more than half drunk, and filled the young monk's glass from a bottle he had in his hand.

"Come, good Father," he said, "to the Holiness of his health!——Pshaw, I slipped. To the health of his Holy, Holiness! And death to——"

"I never drink between meals," replied the young man frigidly.

"Oh! *Parbleu!* You shall drink or, the Devil take me, you shall tell me why!"

At these words he put the bottle on the table and, seizing the glass, held it to the lips of the monk, who bent over his breviary with great self-possession. Several drops of wine fell on the book. The monk immediately sprang up, seized the glass, but instead of drinking he flung its contents into the face of Bois-Dauphin. The entire company set up a laugh. The monk, with his back to the wall, looked fixedly at the rascal.

"Do you know, really, little Father, that pleasantry did

not amuse me at all? By God's day! If you did not wear a robe I would teach you well to know the world, I would."

As he spoke he thrust his hand into the face of the young man and his finger brushed his mustache.

The monk's face flushed purple. With one hand he collared the insolent ruffian and with the other he seized the bottle and smashed it down on his head so hard that Bois-Dauphin fell senseless to the floor, drenched with blood and wine.

"Marvelous, *mon brave!*" cried the old monk. "For one with a hood you make a great showing."

"Bois-Dauphin is dead!" yelled the three brigands, seeing that their comrade did not move. "Ah! Scoundrel! Now we shall make you stand the consequences." They seized their swords; but the young monk, with amazing agility, shoved up the sleeves of his robe, armed himself with the sword of Bois-Dauphin and threw himself on guard in the most resolute manner in the world. At the same time his brother drew from under his robe a poniard with a blade eighteen inches long and placed himself at the other side in a no less martial manner.

"Ah! *Canaille!*" he cried, "we shall teach you about life and give you a lesson in your own profession!"

And in the turn of a hand the three knaves, either wounded or disarmed, were obliged to leave through the window.

"Jesu, Maria!" cried Dame Marguerite, "what champions you are, my good Fathers! You do honor to religion. However, here is a dead man, and that is bad for the reputation of the inn."

"Oh! Not at all, he is not dead," said the old monk; "I can see him squirm; but I shall give him extreme unction."

And he approached the wounded one, caught him up by the hair, placed the edge of the poniard at his throat and would have cut off his head if Dame Marguerite and his companion had not restrained him.

"What are you doing? Good God!" said Marguerite; "kill a man! And one who passes as a good Catholic? However, as we have just seen, he is nothing of the sort."

"I suppose," said the young monk to his colleague, "that pressing affairs call you, as they do me, to Beaugency. There is the boat. Let us hasten."

"You are right, I am with you." He wiped his poniard and replaced it under his robe. Then these two valiant monks, after paying their score, went in company to the Loire, leaving Bois-Dauphin in the hands of Marguerite, who began to feel through his pockets for her pay; then she occupied herself with picking out the splinters of glass which bristled in his face, and finally she dressed his wounds according to all the good rules of women in similar cases.

"Unless I am very much mistaken I have seen you somewhere before," said the young man to the old Franciscan.

"The Devil take me if your face is not familiar to me, also! But——"

"When I saw you for the first time I think you did not wear that robe."

"And you, yourself?"

"Then you are Captain——"

"Dietrich Hornstein at your service; and you are the young gentleman with whom I dined near Étampes?"

"I am the same."

"Your name is Mergy?"

"Yes; but that is not my name at present. I am Brother Ambrose."

"And I am Brother Anthony of Alsace."

"Good! And you are going?"

"To La Rochelle if I can."

"And I, too."

"I am charmed to see you again. But the Devil! You made me furiously embarrassed with your benediction. I did not know a word of it; and at first I took you for a monk if there ever was one."

"I pay you the same compliment."

"Where did you escape from?"

"Paris. And you?"

"From Orleans. I had to hide for more than a week. My poor Rêitres—My cornet—are in the Loire."

"And Mila?"

"Turned Catholic."

"And my horse, Captain?"

"Ah! Your horse? Well I made that scamp of a trumpeter who robbed you run the gauntlet—but, not knowing where you lived, I could not return him to you—and I kept him until I should have the honor of meeting you. By now he, no doubt, belongs to some scoundrel of a Papist."

"Silence! At some other time; here is the boat." Captain, let us join fortunes and be allies as we have been during the last hour."

"As you say, and as long as Dietrich Hornstein has a drop of blood in his veins he will play a good sword at your side." And they joyfully clasped hands on it.

"Ah! But! Tell me, then, the meaning of the devilish history of their chickens and their carps and their perches? It must be that these Papists are a pack of fools."

"Silence! At some other time; here is the boat."

Speaking in this manner they came to the boat and embarked. They reached Beaugency with no further accident than seeing their brothers in religion floating on the Loire.

One of the boatmen remarked that most of them floated on their backs.

"They implore vengeance from Heaven," said Mergy in an understone to the captain of the Rêitres.

Dietrich pressed his hand without replying.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE SIEGE OF LA ROCHELLE

Still hope and suffer all who can!—Moore, *The Fudge Family.*

La Rochelle, of which almost the entire population professed the Reformed Religion, was then considered the capital of the Southern Provinces and the staunchest bulwark of the Protestant party. An extensive commerce with England and Spain had introduced great wealth and that spirit of independence to which it gives origin and support. The inhabitants, either fishermen or sailors, and sometimes even corsairs, early accustomed to the hazards of an adventurous life, had such energy that it took the place of discipline and practice in war. Therefore, at the news of the Massacre of the Twenty-fourth of August, far from abandoning themselves to that stupid resignation which had seized most of the Protestants and made them despair of their cause, the Rochelois were only animated by an active and formidable courage which despair sometimes engenders. With one accord they resolved to endure the last extremity rather than open their gates to an enemy who had just given such striking proof of bad faith and barbarity. While their ministers kept up their zeal with fanatical exhortations, the women, children and old men rivaled each other in working at the repair of the old fortifications and the raising of new ones. They collected provisions and arms; they equipped boats and ships; in short, they did not lose a moment organizing and preparing all the means of defense of which the city was capable. Many gentlemen, escaped from the Massacre, joined the Rochelois and inspired the most timid with courage by the picture they gave of the atrocities of Saint Bartholomew's Eve. To men, saved from what seemed certain death, war and its chances were like a gentle breeze to sailors who have chanced to

escape a storm. Mergy and his companion were among the number of those refugees who came to swell the ranks of the defenders of La Rochelle.

The Court at Paris, alarmed at these preparations, regretted that it had not anticipated them. Marshal de Biron approached La Rochelle bearing terms for an understanding. The King had several reasons for hoping that his choice of Biron would be agreeable to the Rochelois, for the Marshal, far from taking part in the Massacre of Saint Bartholomew, had actually saved many distinguished Protestants and had even pointed the guns of the Arsenal which he commanded at assassins bearing the royal insignia. He demanded only that he be received in the city and recognized as the King's governor, promising to respect the privileges and franchises of the inhabitants and to leave them free exercise of their religion. But after the slaughter of sixty thousand Protestants how was it possible for anyone to put faith in the promises of Charles IX again? Besides, during the course of these very negotiations the massacres continued at Bordeaux; Biron's soldiers pillaged the territory of Rochelle and a royal fleet seized the merchant ships and blockaded the port.

The Rochelois refused to received Biron, and answered that they could not treat with the King while he remained a prisoner of the Guises; perhaps because they really believed that this family was the sole cause of the woes which the Calvinists suffered; and perhaps, according to a fiction often repeated since, because they wished to reassure the consciences of those who might otherwise think that allegiance to the King should have precedence over the interests of their religion. Thenceforth there was no means of coming to an understanding. Still the King thought of another agent, and that was La Noue, whom he sent.

La Noue, surnamed the Arm of Iron because of a false arm which he wore replacing one he had lost in battle, was a zealous Calvinist who in the late Civil Wars had

given proof of the utmost courage and the greatest military talent. The Admiral, his friend, had no more able and devoted lieutenant. During Saint Bartholomew's Eve he was in the Netherlands organizing the undisciplined bands of insurgent Flemings against the Spanish power. Ill served by fortune, he had been obliged to lay down his arms to the Duke of Alva, who treated him very well. Later, when the deluge of blood excited some remorse, Charles IX demanded his release from the Spaniards, and, against every expectation, received him with the greatest affability. Thus the Prince, going to extremes in everything, heaped favors on one Protestant after he had caused the murder of a hundred thousand. A sort of fate seemed to protect the destiny of La Noue. During the Third Civil War he had already been made prisoner, once at Jarnac and again at Montcontour, and was released each time by the King's brother* against the entreaties of certain of his captains who pressed him to sacrifice a man too dangerous to be spared and too honest to be corrupted. Charles thought that La Noue would remember his clemency and charged him to exhort the Rochelois to submit. La Noue accepted but on condition that the King should demand nothing of him that was incompatible with his honor. He left accompanied by an Italian priest who was to keep a watch over him.

Thus from the first he experienced the mortification of finding that he was distrusted. He could not gain admission to La Rochelle, so a small village in the neighborhood was given him as a place of conference. It was at Tadon that he met the deputies of La Rochelle. He knew them all as a man knows his own brothers at arms; but when he appeared not a man extended the hand of friendship to him, not a man appeared to even recognize him. He had to announce himself and then announce the King's conditions. The substance of his discourse was:

*The Duke of Anjou, later Henri III.

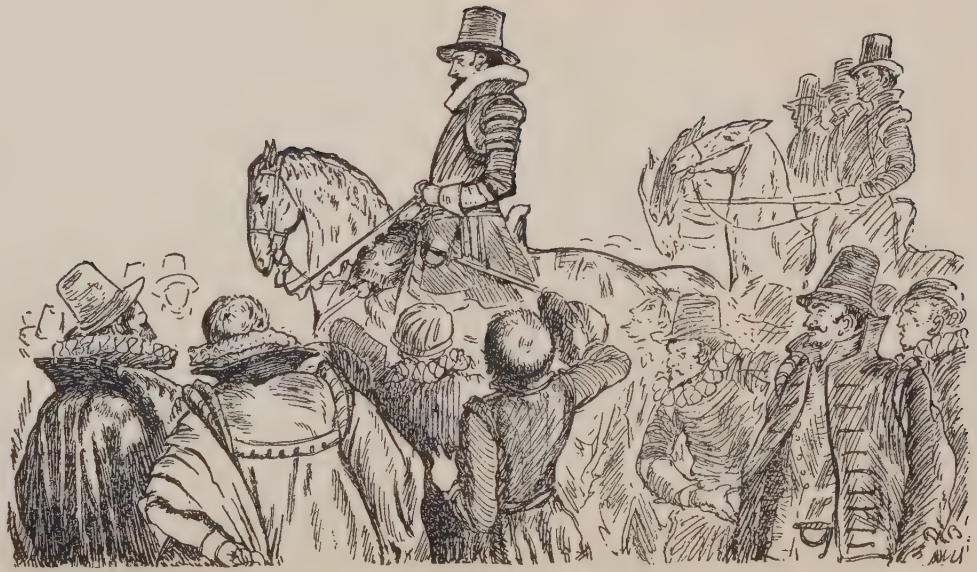
"Trust all the King's promises; civil war is the worst of all evils."

The Mayor of La Rochelle replied with a bitter smile: "We see before us a man who resembles La Noue, but La Noue would not have proposed that his brothers submit to assassins. La Noue loved the late Monsieur Admiral and would wish to avenge him rather than bargain with his murderers. No, you are certainly not La Noue!"

The unfortunate ambassador, cut to the quick by these reproaches, recalled the services he rendered the Calvinist cause, showed his mutilated arm, and protested his devotion to that religion. Little by little the mistrust of the Rochelois disappeared; they opened their gates to La Noue, showed him their resources, and even pressed him to put himself at their head. The offer was very tempting to an old soldier. The oath he gave to Charles included a condition which one might interpret according to one's conscience; La Noue hoped that by putting himself at the head of the Rochelois he should be in a better position to bring them back to pacific thoughts, and he also thought that he might at the same time reconcile his sworn allegiance to his king with that he owed to religion.

He deceived himself. A royal army attacked La Rochelle. La Noue headed every sortie and killed a great number of Catholics; then, returning to the city, he exhorted the townsmen to make peace. What was the result? The Catholics thought that he had broken his word to the King; the Protestants accused him of treason.

In this position La Noue, loaded with insults, tried to kill himself by exposing his life twenty times a day.



CHAPTER XXV

LA NOUE

Foeneste: Cap de you! cet homme ne se mouche pas du talent! —D'Aubigne, *Le Baron de Foeneste.*

The besieged had just made a successful sortie against the advanced works of the Catholic army. They filled many yards of trench, overthrew gabions and killed a hundred soldiers. The detachment gaining this advantage returned to the city through the Tadon Gate. In front marched Captain Dietrich Hornstein with a company of arquebusiers panting for breath, their faces hot and calling for drink, sure signs these that they had not spared themselves. Then followed numerous citizens, and among them one noticed several women who seemed to have taken part in the battle. These were followed by about twoscore prisoners, most of them covered with wounds and placed between two files of soldiers who had great difficulty in defending them from the fury of the people assembled along the route. Finally, about twenty men formed the rear guard. La Noue, to whom Mergy acted as aide-de-camp, marched last of all. His cuirass was dented by a bullet and his horse was wounded in two places. In his left hand he held a pistol just discharged and managed the bridle of his horse by the aid of a hook which issued from his right arm in place of a hand.

"My good friends, let the prisoners pass!" he cried every moment. "Be merciful, good Rochelois! They are wounded; they are defenseless; they are no longer enemies."

But the mob answered him with savage yells: "To the gallows with the Papists! To the gallows! And long live La Noue!"

Mergy and the horsemen emphasized the generous recommendations of their leader with well-aimed blows

from their lance butts. The prisoners were at last led to the city prison and placed under a strong guard in a place where they had nothing to fear from the popular fury. The detachment dispersed, and La Noue, with no other following than a few gentlemen, dismounted before the Town Hall at the same time that the Mayor came out, followed by some citizens and an old minister named Laplace.

"Now then, brave La Noue," said the Mayor, holding out his hand, "you have just shown these assassins that all brave men did not die with Monsieur the Admiral!"

"The affair went very fortunately, Monsieur," said La Noue modestly; "we lost five killed and a few wounded."

"Since it was you who led the sortie, Monsieur de La Noue," replied the Mayor, "we were certain of victory beforehand."

"Eh! What could La Noue do without the aid of God?" cried the old minister acidly. "It is God Almighty who has fought for us today; He heard our prayers!"

"It is God who bestows and denies victory at His will," said La Noue in a calm voice, "and to Him only must we give thanks for success in war."

Then turning to the Mayor: "Well, Monsieur Mayor, has the council deliberated on His Majesty's last offers?"

"Yes," replied the Mayor; "we have just sent the trumpeter back to Monsieur and begged him to spare himself the trouble of summoning us again to surrender. Henceforth we shall answer only with arquebus shots."

"You should have hanged the trumpeter," observed the minister. "For is it not written: 'There be men of Belial come out of the midst of you who have striven to seduce the men of our city. But you shall not spare to slay them; your hand shall be the first on them; and then the hand of all the people!' "

La Noue sighed and raised his eyes to Heaven without replying.

"What! Surrender?" continued the Mayor. "Surrender when the walls are still standing? When the enemy

does not even dare to attack them close while we insult him in his own trenches every day? Listen to me, Monsieur La Noue, were there not a soldier in La Rochelle the women alone would be strong enough to keep off these butchers from Paris."

"Monsieur, when one is stronger he should speak with moderation of his enemy, and when one is weaker——"

"Eh! Who told you we were weaker?" interrupted Laplace. "Does not God fight for us? And Gideon with three hundred men of Israel, was he not strong enough for the entire army of Midianites?"

"You know better, Monsieur Mayor, than any man how insufficient our provisions are. Powder is running short and I had to forbid the arquebusiers risking long shots."

"Montgomery will send us some from England," said the Mayor.

"The fire of Heaven will fall on the Papists," said the minister.

"Bread grows dearer every day, Monsieur Mayor."

"In a day or more the English fleet will be here and then there will be abundance in the city."

"God will cause manna to fall if necessary!" cried Laplace impetuously.

"As for the aid you speak of," continued La Noue, "a few days of south wind will make it impossible for it to enter the harbor. Besides it may be taken."

"The wind blows from the north! I prophesy it, oh man of little faith," said the minister. "You have lost your right arm and your courage at the same time."

La Noue seemed determined not to reply to him. He continued still speaking only to the Mayor:

"The loss of a single man is harder on us than the loss of ten is to the enemy. I fear lest we shall be forced to accept harder conditions than those you have scornfully rejected if the Catholics press the siege with vigor. And if, as I hope, the King contents himself with having his authority recognized by the town without the sacrifices

we should not make, I think it our duty to open our gates to him, for he is our master, after all."

"We have no other master than Christ! And none but impious men call Charles their master, the ferocious Ahab who drinks the blood of the prophets!" And the fury of the minister redoubled as he noted La Noue's imperturbable calm.

"As for me," said the Mayor, "I remember very well how the last time the Admiral passed through our town he said to us: 'The King has pledged me his word that all his subjects, both Protestants and Catholics, shall be treated alike.' Six months after this the King, who gave his word to the Admiral, had him assassinated. If we open our gates they will make a Saint Bartholomew here as they did in Paris."

"The King was deceived by the Guises. He repents and wishes to make atonement for the bloodshed. If you irritate the Catholics by our obstinate refusal to negotiate, the arms of all the forces of the kingdom will strike you and then the only refuge of the Reformed Religion will be destroyed. Peace! Peace! Hear me Monsieur Mayor."

"Coward!" screamed the minister, "you desire peace because you fear for your life!"

"Oh! Monsieur Laplace——" said the Mayor.

"In short," continued La Noue coolly, "my last word is this: that if the King will consent not to put a garrison in La Rochelle and to leave our meetings free, we should offer him the keys and assure him of our submission."

"You are a traitor!" cried Laplace, "and you have been corrupted by the tyrants!"

"Good God! What are you saying, Monsieur Laplace?" said the Mayor.

La Noue smiled slightly and contemptuously.

"You see, Monsieur Mayor, the times we live in are strange: men of war speak of peace while ministers preach war. My dear Monsieur," he continued at last,

addressing Laplace, "it is dinner time and I think your wife undoubtedly expects you home."

These last words brought the minister's fury to the highest pitch. As he could think of nothing insulting to say, and as a box on the ear takes the place of a reasonable answer, he dealt one on the old captain's cheek.

"For God's sake! What are you doing?" cried the Mayor. "Strike Monsieur de La Noue, the finest citizen and bravest soldier of La Rochelle!"

Mergy, who was present, was about to give Laplace a correction he would always keep as a souvenir, but La Noue restrained him.

When his grizzled beard was struck by the hand of the old fool a flash of indignation and anger crossed his eyes for a moment as swift as meditation. But his expression immediately recovered its impassiveness; one might have thought that the minister had struck the marble bust of a Roman senator, or that La Noue had been merely grazed by something inanimate driven by chance against him.

"Take the old man back to his wife," he said to one or the townsmen who was dragging the aged minister away. "Tell her to take care of him; certainly he is not feeling well today. Monsieur Mayor, I pray you get me a hundred and fifty volunteers, because I wish to make a sortie tomorrow at daybreak just at the time the soldiers have spent the night in the trenches and are stiff with cold like bears attacked at thaw. I have often noticed that men who have slept under a good roof have an easy time in the morning managing those who passed the night under the stars. Monsieur de Mergy, if you are not very anxious for dinner will you take a turn with me to the Bastion de l'Evangile? I want to see what the enemy is about.

He saluted the Mayor and, resting his hand on the young man's shoulder, bent his step to the Bastion.

They entered it just at the instant that a cannon shot had mortally wounded two men. The stones were stained

with blood and one of the wretches was imploring his comrades to kill him. La Noue rested his hand on the edge of the parapet and gazed for some time silently at the besiegers' work; then turning to Mergy:

"War is a horrible thing," he said "but a civil war—— That ball was rammed into a French cannon; it was a Frenchman who pointed the cannon and applied the fuse, and those whom the ball slaughtered are two Frenchmen. And yet to cause death half a mile off is nothing; but, Monsieur de Mergy, when one has to plunge a sword into the body of a man who cries for quarter in your own language——! And we have done just that this morning!"

"Ah! Monsieur, if you had but seen the massacres on the twenty-fourth of August! If you had passed the Seine when it ran red and carried more bodies than it does blocks of ice when the thaw breaks, you would feel little pity for the men you fight against. As for me, every Papist is a murderer."

"Do not slander your country. In that army besieging us are a few of the monsters you speak of. The soldiers are French peasants who left their plows to earn the King's pay, and the gentlemen and captains fight because they have sworn the oath of fidelity to the King. Perhaps they are right and we—and we are the rebels."

"Rebels! Our cause is just; we fight for our religion and our lives."

"I see that you have few scruples; you are happy, Monsieur de Mergy." And the old warrior sighed deeply.

"Morbleu!" said a soldier who had just discharged his arquebus, "that devil must carry some charm! For three days I have marked him and I have never even touched him."

"Who is that?" asked Mergy.

"There! Do you see that gallant in the white doublet with a scarf and red plume? Every day he promenades

before our very beards as if to defy us. He is one of those gilded swordsmen from the Court who came with Monsieur."

"It is a long range," said Mergy, "but no matter; give me an arquebus."

A soldier placed his weapon in his hands. Mergy rested the barrel of the gun on the parapet and took very careful aim.

"Suppose he were one of your friends?" said La Noue. "Why do you wish to play the part of an arquebusier?"

Mergy was about to press the trigger; he restrained his finger.

"I have no friend among the Catholics, except one—and that one I am certain is not among our besiegers."

"But suppose your brother were among those accompanying Monsieur——"

The arquebus went off; but Mergy's hand had trembled and one could see that the dust sent up by the bullet was some distance from the promenader. Mergy did not think that his brother could be in the Catholic army; still he was not sorry to see that he had missed his shot. The person at whom he fired continued his march a few steps and then disappeared behind one of the mounds of freshly piled earth which were being hilled up on all sides of the city.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE SORTIE

Hamlet: Dead for a ducat, dead!—SHAKESPEARE.

A fine and chilling rain had fallen without intermission through the night, but finally ceased at the moment when the dawning day was heralded by a pale light on the eastern horizon. It struggled with difficulty through a dense fog resting on the ground which the wind dispersed here and there, making large rifts; but these gray, fleecy masses soon reunited like the waves cut by a ship which falls back and then fills in again the wake it has left. The plain covered by this heavy fog, through which a number of tree tops could be seen, looked like a vast inundation.

In the city the uncertain light of dawn, aided by the light of the torches, revealed a very large troop of soldiers and volunteers assembled in the street leading to the Bastion de l'Évangile. They stamped the pavement with their feet and shook themselves without changing their places as men do who are penetrated with the damp and piercing cold accompanying the rising sun in winter. Oaths and vigorous imprecations were not spared him who had put them under arms so early in the morning; but in spite of their hardships one noticed in their language a good humor and cheerfulness animating soldiers led by a chief they admire. They kept saying in tones half joking and half angry:

"This confounded Man of Iron, this Jean-Never-Sleep, cannot breakfast until he has stirred up those slayers of little children! Fever take him! That devil of a man! With him one never can be sure of a good night's rest. By the beard of the dead Admiral! Unless I hear the arquebus growling soon I shall fall to sleep as if I were

in bed. Ah! *Vivat!* Here is the brandywine coming to wake our hearts in our bodies and save us from getting rheumatism in this devilish fog."

While they were passing the brandywine to the soldiers, the officers surrounding La Noue, who was standing under the penthouse of a shop, listened with interest to the plan of attack which he proposed making against the besieging army. The roll of the drums was heard; each man took his post; a minister came who blessed the soldiers and exhorted them to do their best, promising them eternal life if they could not return to the city "for cause" and receive the rewards and thanks of their fellow-citizens. The sermon was short, but La Noue thought it very long. He was not the same man who the evening before regretted each drop of French blood shed in the war. He was only a soldier and seemed quick to revisit a scene of carnage. As soon as the minister's sermon was over and the soldiers had re-echoed the "Amen!" he cried in a firm and harsh tone of voice: "Comrades! Monsieur has spoken truly. Let us trust in God and our Lady of Strong Strikers. The first man who fires before a Papist's stomach is within range of his wad I shall kill if I return alive."

"Monsieur," Mergy said to him in a low voice, "this is a very different discourse from that of last night."

"Do you know Latin?" La Noue asked him brusquely.

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Good! Remember that excellent saying: *Age quod agis.*"

He gave the signal; some one fired a cannon shot and the entire troop set out at quick march for the plain; at the same time small groups of soldiers, marching out by different gates, went to beat alarms at several points of the enemies' lines so that the Catholics, thinking themselves assailed on all sides, would not dare send reinforcements to the grand attack, fearing to desert any of their trenches which were everywhere menaced.

The Bastion de l'Evangile, against which the engineers

of the Catholic army were directing their efforts, had in particular to stand the battery of five cannons located on a slight eminence surmounted by a ruined building which was a mill before the siege. A trench with an earthwork defended the approach on the side of the city, and in front of the ditch several arquebusiers were placed as sentinels. But, as the Protestant captain foresaw, their arquebuses, exposed to the damp for a number of hours, were sure to be almost useless; and the assailants, very well equipped in preparation for an attack, had a great advantage over these men who were taken by surprise, weary with watching, soaked with rain and shivering with cold.

The first sentinels were speared. Several arquebus shots going off by some miracle woke the battery guards in time to see the enemy already over the parapet and climbing up the slope toward the mill. Some of them offered resistance, but their weapons dropped from their hands which were stiff with cold; almost every arquebus missed fire, while not a shot or blow from the assailants was lost. Victory was no longer doubtful, and the Protestants, already masters of the battery, yelled out: "Give no quarter! Remember the twenty-fourth of August!"

Fifty or more soldiers were stationed in the mill tower; the captain, in his nightcap and shirt, holding a pillow in one hand and his sword in the other, opened the gate and came out demanding the reason for the disturbance. Little thinking of a sortie from the enemy, he imagined the noise due to some brawl among his own soldiers. He was cruelly disillusioned, for a halberd blow knocked him to the ground bathed in his own blood. His soldiers had time to shut and barricade the gate of the tower, and for some time they defended their advantage by firing from the windows; but a great mass of straw and hay, as well as of brushwood for the gabions, happened to be stacked against the building. The Protestants set this on fire and in an instant the flames enveloped the tower and

mounted up to its summit. Soon one heard horrible cries issue forth. The roof was in flames and ready to fall on the unfortunates it sheltered. The gate was on fire and the barricades they made for themselves prevented their escape through that passage. If they tried to leap from the windows they fell into the fire or were speared on the points of the pikes.

Then one saw a frightful spectacle. An ensign, encased in complete armor, tried to leap from the narrow window like the others. His cuirass ended in a sort of iron skirt, a very common fashion, which covered the thighs and stomach and widening like the mouth of a funnel in such a manner as to facilitate walking. The window was not wide enough to let this part of the armor pass; and in his dilemma the ensign plunged with such violence that most of his body was outside, but he was unable to move, held as he was in a kind of a vice. Meanwhile the flames mounted to him, heated his armor and slowly roasted him as in a furnace or in the famous brazen bull invented by Palaris.* The unfortunate uttered hideous cries and vainly waved his arms as if imploring assistance. There was a moment of silence among the assailants; then all of them together, as if by common consent, shouted a war-cry as if to divert themselves from hearing the groans of the burning man. He disappeared in a blast of flames and smoke, and one could see a helmet, red hot and smoking, fall in the middle of the wreckage of the tower. Sensations of horror and grief are of short duration in the thick of battle; the instinct for self-preservation speaks so loudly to the soldier's spirit that he is insensitive to the miseries of others. While one party of the Rochelois pursued the fugitives, others spiked the guns, smashed their wheels

*One can see armor like this at the Musée de l'artillerie. A very fine sketch of a tournament by Rubens shows how it was still possible to mount a horse while wearing this iron skirt. The saddles are topped by a small stool, which goes under the skirt and raises the rider until his knees are almost on a level with his horse's head. For the man burned in his armor see D'Aubigné: Histoire Universelle.

and hurled the gabions of the battery and the corpses of its defenders into the trench.

Mergy, who was among the first to escalade the trench and rampart, took breath for a brief interval to scratch the name of Diane on one of the battery guns with the point of his dagger; then he helped others destroy the besiegers' works.

One soldier lifted up the head of the Catholic captain who gave no sign of life, another took his feet and, swinging him in cadence, they were about to hurl him into the ditch. Suddenly the apparent corpse opened his eyes, recognized Mergy and cried:

"Quarter, Monsieur de Mergy! I am a prisoner, save me! Do you not recognize your friend Béville?"

The face of the unfortunate was covered with blood and Mergy had trouble in recognizing in this dying man the young courtier whom he had last seen full of life and gaiety. He stretched him carefully on the grass, bound up the wounds himself and after placing him across a horse ordered that he be taken into the city.

As he bade him farewell and helped to lead the horse out of the battery he saw a body of cavalry advancing at a trot between the city and the mill through an opening in the fog. To all appearance it was a detachment of the Catholic army trying to cut off their retreat. Mergy at once hastened to warn La Noue.

"If you will give me only forty arquebusiers," he said, "I shall throw myself behind the hedge bordering the sunken road through which they must pass, and if they do not turn their bridles about very quickly you may hang me."

"Very well, my boy. You will make a good general some day. Come the rest of you, follow this gentleman and carry out his commands."

In an instant Mergy stationed his arquebusiers along the hedge; he made them kneel on one knee, prepare their weapons and, above all, forbade them to fire without his order.

The enemy cavalry advanced rapidly and the trot of their horses was already heard clearly in the mud of the sunken road.

"Their captain," said Mergy in a low voice, "is the rascal with the red plume whom we missed yesterday. We shall not miss him today."

The arquebusier on his right nodded as if to say he would attend to that. The horsemen were not twenty paces off and their leader, turning to his men, seemed about to give an order when Mergy, rising suddenly, shouted:

"Fire!"

The captain with the red plume turned his head and Mergy recognized his brother. He dashed his hand toward the arquebus of his neighbor to push it aside, but before he could touch it the shot had sped. The horsemen, surprised at the unexpected volley, dispersed and fled over the plain. Captain George fell down pierced by two bullets.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE HOSPITAL

Father: Why are you so obstinate?
Pierre: Why you so troublesome, that a poor wretch
Can't die in peace,
But you, like ravens, will be croaking round him?
OTWAY, *Venice Preserved.*

An ancient monastery, commandeered some time before by the Town Council of La Rochelle, was turned into a hospital for the wounded during the siege. The pavement of the chapel, cleared of the benches, altar and all the ornaments, was covered with hay and straw; it was here that they carried the common soldiers. The refectory was set aside for the officers and gentlemen. This was a very spacious hall with a splendid wainscoting of oak and the walls were pierced with large pointed windows giving sufficient daylight for the surgical operations performed continually.

Here lay Captain George on a mattress stained in his own blood and that of the many other unhappy men who preceded him to this place of pain. A pad of straw served as his pillow. They had taken off his cuirass and torn aside his doublet and shirt. He was naked to the waist but his right arm was still covered by the steel armpiece and gauntlet. A soldier staunched the blood which flowed from his wounds, one in his body just below the cuirass, the other in the left arm. Mergy was so

overcome with grief that he could give no effectual aid. Sometimes kneeling before him in tears, then rolling on the floor with groans of despair, he accused himself unceasingly of slaying the tenderest of brothers and best of friends. The captain in the meanwhile was calm and tried to moderate his feelings.

Two steps from his mattress was another on which poor Béville lay stretched in an equally serious condition. But his features bore none of that tranquil expression of resignation one noticed on those of the captain. From time to time he gave a deep groan and turned his eyes to his neighbor as if to ask for a little of his courage and fortitude.

A tall, thin, wrinkled man about forty years old entered the hall and approached Captain George, holding in his hand a green bag from which a certain rattling noise issued, very terrifying to the poor wounded men. It was Master Brisart, a very skilful surgeon for his day and friend and pupil of the celebrated Ambrose Paré. He had just operated, because his arms were bared to the elbows and he still wore a huge apron all red with blood.

"What do you want with me and who are you?" George asked him.

"I am a surgeon, good sir, and if you never heard of Master Brisart there must be many things of which you are ignorant. Come, as they say, take sheep's courage! I know arquebus wounds, thank God, and I wish I had as many sacks of a thousand livres as the number of bullets I have extracted from men who are today as well as I."

"See here, doctor, tell me the truth. Am I to learn the wound is mortal?"

The surgeon first examined the left arm and said: "A bagatelle!" Then he began to probe the other wound, an operation which made the wounded man wince and writhe horribly. He still had enough strength in his right arm to push aside the surgeon's hand.

"*Parbleu!* No deeper, *docteur du diable!*" he cried; "I see by your expression that I am done for."

"Look you, my good gentleman, I greatly fear that the bullet crossed from the larger to the smaller intestine and, striking upwards, has lodged in the dorsal spine, which we also call in Greek *rachis*. What makes me think so is that your legs are now without life and already cold. This is a pathognomonic sign which never deceives; in which case——"

"An arquebus shot fired at close range and a ball in the spine! *Peste!* Doctor, that is more than enough to send a poor devil *ad patres*. Come, torment me no longer and let me die in peace."

"No, he shall live! He will live!" cried Mergy, looking at the surgeon wildly and firmly clutching his arm.

"Yes, he will live an hour longer, perhaps two," said Master Brisart coolly, "for he is a strong man."

Mergy again fell to his knees, seized the captain's right hand and moistened the iron gauntlet covering it with tears.

"Two hours?" repeated George. "So much the better. I was afraid I had much longer to suffer."

"No, that is impossible!" cried Mergy sobbing. "George, you must not die. A brother cannot die by his brother's hand!"

"Come now, keep quiet and do not shake me. I feel every movement of yours just here. I do not suffer at the moment; if it will only last—as the zany said as he fell from the bell-tower."

Mergy sat down by the mattress, his head on his knees and his face in his hands. He was as motionless as if petrified; at intervals convulsive movements made his whole body shake as if in a shivering of fever, and moans unlike the sound of a human voice came with effort from his breast.

The surgeon applied some bandages merely to stop the bleeding, wiped the probe with great unconcern and then:

"I strongly advise you to prepare yourself," he said;

"if you want a minister, there are plenty here. If you prefer a priest, they will send you one. I saw a monk shortly whom one of our men had taken prisoner. Look, there he is confessing a Papist officer who is dying."

"Give me a drink," said the captain.

"Beware of that! Or you will die an hour sooner."

"One hour of life is not worth a glass of wine. Go! adieu, doctor; here at my side is one who awaits you with impatience."

"Shall I send you a minister or a monk?"

"Neither the one nor the other."

"What?"

"Let me alone."

The surgeon shrugged his shoulders and turned to Béville.

"By my beard!" he cried, "this is a beautiful wound! These devilish volunteers strike like madmen!"

"But I shall recover, shall I not?" asked the wounded man feebly.

"Draw in your breath," said Master Brisart.

Then they heard a feeble whistle; this was produced by the air which left Béville's chest through his wound as well as through his lips, and the blood ran from the opening like a scarlet froth.

The surgeon whistled as if in imitation of this strange sound; then he bandaged the wound hastily and without saying a word picked up his instrument case and prepared to leave. Meanwhile Béville's eyes followed all his movements glittering like two torches.

"Well, doctor?" he asked in a trembling voice.

"Pack up your bundles," said the surgeon coldly. And then turned away.

"Alas! To die so young!" cried the unfortunate Béville, and let his head fall back on the bundle of straw which served as his pillow.

Captain George asked for a drink, but no one would give him even a glass of water for fear of hastening his end. A strange humanity which serves to prolong suffer-

ing! At this moment La Noue and Captain Dietrich and also several other officers entered the hall to see the wounded. They halted before George's mattress, and La Noue, leaning on his sword hilt, looked at the two brothers alternately with eyes in which all the emotion he experienced in the sad scene was depicted.

A canteen suspended at the German captain's side attracted George's attention.

"Captain," he said to him, "you are an old soldier——"

"Yes, an old soldier. Powder smoke grizzles a beard much quicker than years. I am called Captain Dietrich Hornstein."

"Tell me, then, what would you do if you were wounded as I am?"

Captain Dietrich looked at the wounds for a moment like a man accustomed to see and judge their gravity.

"I should put my conscience in order," he answered, "and I should then ask for a glass of good Rheinish wine if there were a bottle anywhere near."

"Well, as for me, I only asked for a little of their bad Rochelle wine and the imbeciles will not give it to me."

Dietrich detached his canteen, which was of very imposing proportions, and started to give it to the wounded man.

"What are you doing?" cried one of the arquebusiers; "the doctor says that he will die at once if he drinks."

"What of that? He will have a short time of pleasure before he dies. Come, *mon brave,* I am only sorry that I have no better wine to offer you."

"You are a gallant man, Captain Dietrich," said George after his drink. Then passing the canteen to his neighbor: "and you, my poor Béville, will you say I am right?"

But Béville shook his head without replying.

"Oh! Oh!" said George, "more torment! What! Will they never let me die in peace?"

He saw a minister coming up with a Bible under his arm.

"My son," said the minister, "when you go——"

"Enough! Enough! I know what you want to say, but it is trouble lost. I am a Catholic."

"Catholic!" cried Béville. "Then you are no longer an atheist."

"But once," said the minister, "you were bred in the Reformed Religion; and at this solemn and terrible moment when you are about to appear before the Supreme Judge of actions and consciences——"

"I am a Catholic. By the horns of the Devil! Leave me in peace!"

"But——"

"Captain Dietrich, take pity on me! You have done me one great service; I beg you do me still another. Arrange it so that I can die without exhortations and Jeremiads."

"You get out!" said the captain to the minister; "don't you see he is not in the mood to listen to you?"

La Noue made a sign to the monk, who instantly approached.

"Here is a priest of your religion," he said to Captain George; "we do not pretend to force men's consciences."

"Monk or minister, let them both go to the Devil!" replied the wounded man.

The monk and the minister were on each side of the cot and seemed ready to dispute for the dying one.

"This gentleman is a Catholic," said the monk.

"But he was born a Protestant," said the minister; "he belongs to me."

"But he was converted."

"But he wishes to die in the faith of his fathers."

"Confess, my son."

"Say your creed, my son."

"Do you not die a good Catholic?——"

"Dismiss this envoy of Anti-Christ!" cried the minister, who felt the support of the majority of the audience.

Immediately a zealous Huguenot soldier seized the monk by the girdle to his robe and shoved him back

crying: "Get out of here, tonsure! Gallows bird! It is a long time since any masses were chanted at La Rochelle."

"Stop!" said La Noue. "If this gentleman wishes to confess I swear on my word that no one shall interfere."

"Many thanks, Monsieur de La Noue——" said the dying man in a faint voice.

"You are all witnesses," interrupted the monk, "he wishes to confess."

"No! The Devil take me!"

"He returns to the faith of his fathers!" cried the minister.

"No, a thousand thunders, no! Let me alone both of you. Am I already dead that the ravens have to quarrel over my corpse? I want neither your masses nor your psalms."

"He blasphemes!" cried the two ministers of the opposing faiths.

"It is good to believe in something," said Captain Dietrich with imperturbable calm.

"I believe in—the fact that you are a brave man who will deliver me from these harpies. Yes, get out both of you, and let me die like a dog!"

"Yes, die like a dog," said the minister, and recoiled with indignation. The monk made the sign of the cross and approached the cot of Béville.

La Noue and Mergy halted the minister: "Make one last effort," said Mergy. "Have pity on him! Have pity on me!"

"Monsieur," said La Noue to the dying man, "believe an old soldier, the exhortations of a man of God can soften the last hours of a dying man. Do not listen to the counsels of a guilty vanity and lose your soul out of sheer bravado."

"Monsieur," replied the captain, "it is not until to day that I thought of death. I have no need of anyone's exhortations to prepare me for it. I never loved bravado

and at this moment less than ever, But, by the Devil! I will have nothing to do with their nonsense!"

The minister shrugged his shoulders. La Noue sighed. both walked slowly away with bowed heads.

"Comrade," said Dietrich, "you must suffer like the Devil to talk as you do."

"Yes, Captain, I suffer like the Devil."

"Then I hope that the good God will not be offended at your words, although they sound like terrible blasphemies. But when one has an arquebus shot clean through the body—*morbleu!*—it is quite permissible to swear a little to console oneself."

George smiled and took the canteen again. "To your health, Captain! You are the best nurse that a wounded man can have." And as he spoke he held out his hand to him.

Captain Dietrich pressed it with some emotion. "The Devil!" he muttered very low. "Suppose my brother Hennig were a Catholic and I had shot him with an arquebus through the body!——This, then, is the explanation of Mila's prophecy."

"George, my comrade," said Béville in a piteous voice, "talk to me just once more!—We shall die; it is a terrible moment!—Do you still think as you did when you converted me to atheism?"

"Unquestionably! Courage! In a few moments we shall suffer no more."

"But this priest tells me of fire—of Devils—what do I know, I?—But it seems to me that none of all this is comforting."

"It is nauseous!"

"Suppose it were true?"

"Captain," said George, "I bequeath you my cuirass and my sword; and I wish that I had something better to offer you for the good wine you have given me so generously."

"George, my dear friend," began Béville, "it would be terrible if what he says were true—eternity!"

"You poltroon!"

"Yes, poltroon—that is easy to say; one is permitted to be a poltroon when it is a matter of suffering through all eternity."

"Very well then! Confess!"

"I pray you tell me, are you certain there is no Hell?"

"Bah!"

"No, but tell me. Are you very certain? Swear to me on your word that there is no Hell."

"I am certain of nothing. If there is a Devil we shall see if he is good and black."

"What! Are you not certain?"

"Confess yourself, I tell you."

"But you will laugh at me?"

The captain could not suppress a smile, but then said in a serious tone: "In your place I should confess, for it is always the most certain game; and after anointment and confession one is prepared for any event."

"Good! I shall do as you do. You confess first."

"No!"

"*Ma foi!*——Say what you may but I am going to die a good Catholic. Come, my Father! Here me say my *confiteor* and prompt me, because I have forgotten some of it."

While he confessed Captain George took another drink of wine, stretched his head back on his wretched pillow and shut his eyes. He was quiet for about quarter of an hour. Then he tightened his lips and shuddered as he gave a long groan, wrenched from him by agony. Mergy, thinking he was dead, gave a sharp cry and lifted his head. The captain opened his eyes.

"What, again?" he said with gentle reproof, "I pray you, Bernard, calm yourself."

"George! George! And you are dying by my hand!"

"Well, what of that? I am not the first Frenchman killed by his brother—and I do not think I shall be the last. But I have only myself to blame. When Monsieur, after delivering me from prison, took me with him I

swore that I should never draw sword. But they told me that this poor devil Béville was attacked—when I heard the firing of the arquebuses I wished to see the thing close up——"

He shut his eyes again. He opened them once more to say to Mergy: "Madame de Turgis charged me to tell you that she loves you still." He smiled tenderly.

These were his last words. He died in about a quarter of an hour apparently without much suffering. A few minutes later Béville died in the arms of the monk, who later assured his listeners that he distinctly heard the joyful shouts of the Angels in the air as they received the spirit of this repentant sinner, while the Devils responded with a howl of triumph from under the earth as they carried off the soul of Captain George.

One can read in all the histories of France how La Noue left La Rochelle, disgusted with the Civil War and tormented by his conscience with reproaches for fighting against his king; how the Catholic army was forced to raise the siege, and how they concluded the fourth peace, which was soon followed by the death of Charles IX.

Did Mergy console himself? And Diane, did she find another lover? I leave these matters to be decided by the reader, who will thus in every case finish the romance to his own taste.

THE END

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